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# Relics, oaths and politics in thirteenth-century Siam

David K. Wyatt

*Recent efforts have re-dated the Wat Bang Sanuk inscription to 1219, long before the Ram Khamhaeng inscription of 1292. Attempts to assess the implications force a re-thinking of Thai rebellion against Angkor by linking rebellion to religious thought, including especially the discovery and public show of relics of the Buddha.*

Among the many difficulties that plague the earlier (and later) history of Thailand, two are especially vexing: the problem of defining the geographical units of history, and the problem of understanding the motivations that impelled important actions.

The problem of defining units arises from reading back into previous history the units that have been the scenes of modern history. Thus, for example, we might anachronistically refer to 'fourteenth-century Thailand' when we really mean fourteenth-century Ayudhya and its immediate neighbours. The problem is further compounded when such 'national' units are identified and defined in ethnic terms, so that, for example, the people of fourteenth-century Ayudhya are referred to as 'Thai' and their enemies and rivals become 'Khmer' or 'Lao' or 'Burmese'. One of the several reasons why this is so pernicious an error is that such ethnic identities were not defined in earlier centuries in the same way as they have come to be defined in more recent times. Even when such labels were placed on groups of people by contemporary sources, we must not assume that those labels necessarily meant the same thing in former times as they do today; nor can we assume that, when people are said to have acted in such-and-such a way 'because' they were 'Thai', they necessarily meant by 'Thai-ness' what we might mean today.

If we must therefore be extremely careful in attributing 'national' and 'ethnic' identities to groups of people in the past, what can we do to meet our need to refer to social and political collectivities?

To begin with, in order to avoid imputing to the past the national and ethnic categories of the present, we must be careful to avoid going any further in such identifications than the sources themselves allow. This means, for example, that although a ruler of Sukhothai might use the Thai language, and behave in ways that we now consider to be characteristic of 'Thai', we might in most contexts be better off referring to him as the ruler of 'Sukhothai' rather than as 'Thai'; that is, we might better employ relatively objective geographical terms rather than to use loaded or politically-charged national and ethnic labels. This is still a somewhat radical idea, which goes against the grain of all that has been written in recent decades of 'Thai' history (including much that I have written myself). Before applying it to the whole of the long centuries of the history of the central Indochina Peninsula, it would be preferable to try it first over a small area during a short period of time.

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The second problem, that of imputing motivation to people in the past, has always been a difficult issue for historians. It is especially difficult for the historian of ancient times, where evidence for what important figures might have thought often is lacking. It is difficult to make this point in the abstract, so let us directly confront one of the central problems of the thirteenth century. In general, or at least in outline, we think we know 'what happened'. The once-powerful empire centred on Angkor was within a brief period challenged and displaced by numerous groups of people, usually referred to as Thai, who inhabited the western portions of the Angkorean empire. One after another, in quick succession they rose in 'rebellion'. They are often said to have been expressing a separate identity as Thai and as Theravāda Buddhists, and are said to have been rebelling against an Angkor that was Khmer and Hindu. Some even refer to a movement of rebellion among the Thai.

Even in the abstract, there are considerable problems with the usual interpretations of the history of the thirteenth century. There were many separate rebellions. Some of their leaders were what is thought of as Thai, but others were people whom we might think of as Khmer or Shan or Lao. Even when one 'rebellion' is taken to stand for the rest, as at Sukhothai, the usual interpretations are inclined to explain 'rebellion' or 'revolution' as a natural response to tyranny or oppression. In part to counter the argument that such oppression had long existed, and could have been used to justify rebellion a century or two earlier or later, the historian often has resorted to the wholly specious argument that there was more or worse oppression at the particular time of the rebellion, despite the lack of any real evidence for such assertions.

It is not excessive to argue that historians have been taking too simple a view of motivation, and have failed to consider that human motivation can be extremely complex. In particular, the modern historian has been too much inclined to de-value, and thus to underestimate, what we might refer to as 'religion'. Religion here can be taken in its broadest sense, to include reference to that broad category of human experience that is based upon unexamined assumptions about why things happen, or more generally about the moral universe (which also includes much of the natural universe). We will be concerned here with a very specific act of 'rebellion' against Angkor – that carried out by Pha Müang and his ally Bang Klang Hao, which led to the foundation of the kingdom of Sukhothai at some time between c. 1219 and 1243. What is particularly problematic in that event is the explanation of why the conspirators might have had the courage, the effrontery and even the self-confidence to take military action against the local representative of Angkor's power, the hapless Khloñ Lamphang.

This is a period for which the evidence is scant. Stone inscriptions, which are the mainstay of the writing of the history of earlier centuries, are scarce in the thirteenth century, and historical writings set down on more perishable materials refer to that period. There are, however, a few such inscriptions; and to their number has recently been added another. In 1996, Dr Hans Penth announced his re-dating to AD 1219 of the Wat Bang Sanuk Inscription from Phræ province, formerly notionally assigned to AD 1339. The addition of this inscription to the few we already have, has served to highlight their similarities and differences, and sheds new light on the early thirteenth century.

### An historical stage

Eight hundred years ago, the vast Central Plain of what is now Thailand was not nearly as populous nor as densely settled as it is today. Where now there are rice-fields in every direction, back then there was still lush forest, much wildlife like elephants and even tigers, and few buildings to

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interrupt the skyline. Much of the southern part of the plain – which we will here call by its ancient name, Siam – was then still inundated much of the year, either by the sea or by overflowing rivers that rushed down from the north laden with the silt that ultimately would make it among the most productive rice-plains in the world.

Human habitation was concentrated around the fringes of the plain, from Ratburi, Phetburi, Nakhòn Chaisi and Suphanburi on the west; and Lopburi, Singburi, Inburi, and Chainat on the east; to Phitsanulok, Kamphængphet, Tak, Sukhothai and Si Satcanalai in the north. The territory between them was swampy, which reduced its agricultural potential but also facilitated communication among them. Although this area was similar to the important areas that lay beyond it in all directions, it also had a distinctive identity of its own. It might be more accurate to say that it had multiple identities, and it was this multicultural quality that tended to make it different from neighbouring areas that were more culturally homogeneous.

Two things contributed to its multicultural character. First, the Central Plain was a multiethnic region. It would be simplistic to say that different ethnic groups inhabited this area, including Mōn and Khmer, to which substantial numbers of Tai speakers increasingly were added. However, the specificities of the various ethnic groups were far less important than the fact of their persistent mixture. After all, the ethnic groups that we now associate with such labels as 'Mōn', 'Khmer' and 'Tai' are complex identities that are composed of cultural traits incorporated from a variety of sources. It would be better to think of the population of the Central Plain as 'Siamese', which is not intended here as a synonym for 'Thai', but rather is intended to convey a sense of ethnic complexity, or an 'ethnicity-in-the-process-of-becoming'.

The second thing that contributed to the multicultural quality of Siam was the fact that, from the early years of the first millennium, it was subjected to, or rather participated in, a wide variety of what we might call 'international' contacts. In a profoundly literal sense, it lay at one of the great crossroads of international communications. It lay athwart a main line of East–West trade, the trade that linked (at its farthest extremes) China and the Mediterranean. Both when the international seaborne trade timidly moved along the coasts and touched at ports at the head of the Gulf of Siam, and then later when that trade found it convenient to use the land portage between the Gulf of Siam and the Gulf of Martaban (in what is now Burma), foreigners regularly passed by, not only with their precious commodities but also with their strange ways, their ideas and their languages. The local people, particularly on the southern fringe of Siam, must have been well set up to deal with these transients, who might have remained for long periods of time while they awaited the next ship to China, the next caravan over the mountains or the next seasonal change in the winds.

The East–West trade, however, was not the only such fixture in the life of the Siamese. They were also regularly in contact with people in all the other directions. Trade up the westernmost of the four great rivers of the north, the Ping, put them in touch with the strongly Buddhist culture of the Chiang Mai Valley centred on Haripuñjaya (Lamphun) and, beyond Lamphun, with the Burmese and Mōn world of what is now Burma. A similar route that went over the mountains to the west, via what is now Tak and Mæ Sòt, also linked them with the Buddhist Mōn of the region around the head of the Gulf of Martaban. A third route with the same destination went west and northwest from Ratburi and Phetburi via Kancanaburi and the Three Pagodas Pass. To the south, they could communicate with the Malay world by land and by sea down the Malay Peninsula. In general, all these routes went in what we might call an 'Indic' direction – that is, the most powerful forces that impinged on Siam from the West were Indic in inspiration, including especially but not exclusively Buddhism. (We must remember that Buddhism was never devoid of the arts and sciences of India,

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without which that religion would have been unintelligible to, and uncomprehending of, the world. We should also note that Buddhism did not necessarily come to Siam directly from Sri Lanka or India: it often came from the Mōn country of coastal Burma.)

Quite different issues were involved in Siam's connections with the regions lying to its east and north. To the east, and especially towards what is now Cambodia in the southeast, lay an increasingly powerful Angkorean empire, centred on the great capital at the northwestern end of the Great Lake (Tonle Sap), which was a dominant (and dominating) force in the life of the region from the tenth and eleventh centuries. During these centuries, Angkor was regarded not only as a source of ideas, inspiration and influence that were 'Indic' in character – involving both religion and the arts and sciences – but also as a political, military and economic power. Moreover, Angkor was a force to be reckoned with not only from the 'Cambodia' direction, but also from the direction of what the modern Thai call 'Isan' or the 'Northeast', for Angkor was a commanding presence over much of the Khorat Plateau. Like the various principalities to the west in what is now Burma, the Angkorean world could be both a source of precious commodities (like copper and gold) and a potentially lucrative and insatiable market that might absorb (or appropriate) the riches of the Siamese.

Finally, to the north lay routes into the uplands of interior Indochina, primarily up the Yom and Nan Rivers. Although in the short run these routes might have been less active or busy avenues of influence, in the longer run they were to prove at least as powerful. Up there, in small river valleys that may have disgorged as often into the Mekong as into the Caophraya River system, there were people whose lives had been little touched by the civilisations of Angkor and Dvāravatī (the civilisation of Siam in the sixth to ninth centuries), who were more concerned with the trolls and spirits of the hills and streams than they were with the Buddha or Śiva and Vishnu. Their ethnic and linguistic identities must have been constantly changing, for they regularly socialised with, and married, the various upland, non-state peoples. Politically they may have been impressed – more by rumours than by contact – with the powerful kingdom of Nan-chao in what is now Yunnan, and by the Chinese whose steady move towards the south had brought them into what is now southern China and northern Viet Nam. In all these respects, then, they differed sharply from the people among whom they were beginning to live in the south, in what we have been calling Siam.

We begin, therefore, with a single 'zone' of Siam that was simultaneously singular and plural. We can refer to it as 'Siam', and to its inhabitants as 'Siamese', as a singular entity because it shared a certain coherence as a region. It was not nearly as monocultural (or monolinguistic, or monoethnic) as any of its major neighbours (though each of them had some degree of pluralism). Or, to say the same thing another way, it was more polycultural, or pluralistic, than any of its neighbours. At the same time, it was rarely unitary in a political sense. There may have been a single kingdom that dominated Siam (and, indeed, extended itself at least to the northeast) called Dvāravatī, between the sixth and ninth centuries. A few coins have been found in the region emanating from a so-called 'Lord of Dvāravatī', but we cannot be sure even of where his capital was.[1] Dvāravatī usually is referred to as a culture rather than a kingdom, not least because its surviving remains tended to be cultural – a certain consistently Buddhist civilisation, with a distinctive art style and set of urban patterns, as well as durable expression in the Mōn language.[2]

1 Robert S. Wicks, *Money, Markets, and Trade in Early Southeast Asia: The Development of Indigenous Monetary Systems to AD 1400* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1992), pp. 157-63. A stimulating synthesis of Dvāravatī's history is Dhida Saraya, *(Sī) Thawārawadī* (Bangkok: Müang Bōrān, 1989). She expresses a preference for the Suphanburi region for its capital.

2 See Dhida Saraya, *(Sri) Dvaravati: The Initial Phase of Siam's History* (Bangkok: Müang Bōrān, 1999).

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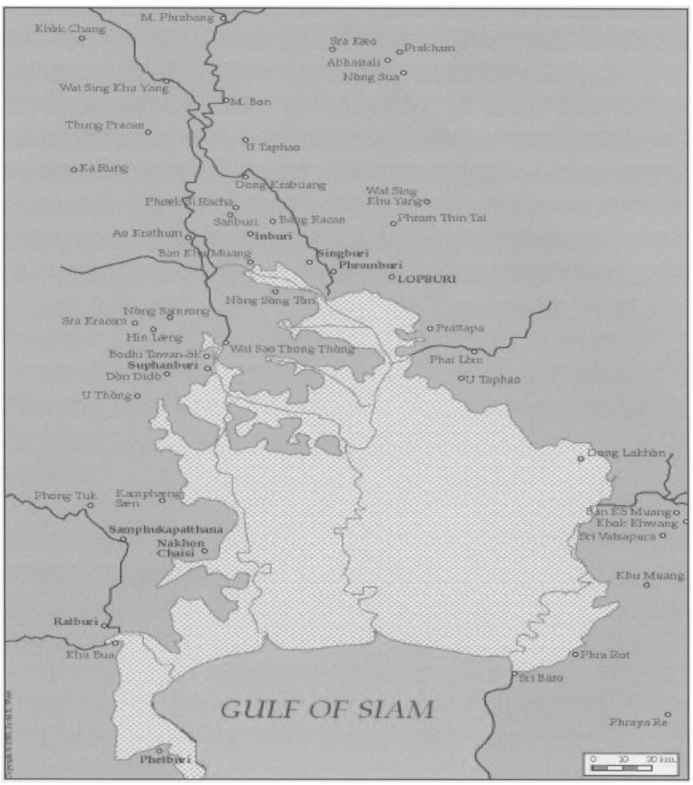


**Map 1.** Hypothetical Reconstruction of the Ancient Shoreline of the Gulf of Siam, after Phongsi & Thiwa, 1981.

The use of the latter does not necessarily mean that the people were ethnically Mōn; it only says that their civilisation seems to have been oriented in a westerly direction, the direction from which came certain styles of religious thought, alphabets, ways of organising space and people, and so forth. The actual population probably was ethnically very diverse, composed possibly of people who at another time might have been considered Mōn, Khmer, Malay, Cham or Karen, and who in later centuries might be successively 'Khmer' and 'Thai'.

Considering the modern landform of central Thailand, we might be expected to think of the essentially unitary nature of the Central Plain. However, if we follow the work of geologists and historical geographers and are reminded that the ancient coastline was far inland from the modern seacoast, a very different picture of this region emerges. When Phòngsi Wanasin and Thiwa Supcanya plotted all the Dvāravatī period (sixth–ninth centuries AD) remains – in the form of walled and moated settlements – on an elevational map of the region, it became apparent that all the early sites were to be found on the fringes of the 'Central Plain', at elevations in excess of 3.5 metres.[3] Ruling out what is now the heartland of Thailand, this leaves us with a string of ancient towns on the west, from Phetburi up to Suphanburi (and further north), and a separate row of ancient towns on a line running northwest-to-southeast from Chainat (Phræk Si Raja), Inburi, Singburi and Phromburi to Lopburi and down towards what are now Pracinburi and Chonburi.[4] We might think of there having been a basic economic distinction between the west and the east sides of what must then have been an

3 Phòngsi Wanasin and Thiwa Supcanya, *Müang bōrān bòriwēn chaifang thalē dœm khòng thīrap phāk klāng Prathēt Thai (Ancient cities on the former coastline in the Central Plain of Thailand)* (Chulalongkorn University Research Report Series, no. 1; Bangkok, 1981).

4 This work builds on the pathbreaking work of Yoshikazu Takaya, 'Topographical Analysis of the Southern Basin of the Central Plain, Thailand', *Tonan Ajia Kenkyu* (Southeast Asian Studies), 7, 2 (Dec. 1969): 293-300. I have based Map 1 on Phòngsi and Thiwa, *Müang bōrān*, p. 46.

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ancient swamp – the west being oriented towards trade and the east towards agriculture, though this is probably oversimplified. Nonetheless, it makes sense to consider the two sides of the intruding Gulf of Siam as parts of a single unit because the early archaeological remains from the area point towards their sharing a single culture and civilisation that was Buddhist. At least between the sixth and ninth centuries we refer to this culture and civilisation as Dvāravatī.

However, we can also refer to Siam as plural because different parts of the Central Plain had different experiences over the last half of the first millennium and much of the second. The western side of the plain had more contact with the Mōn and Malay worlds to the west and south, while the eastern side was more often in touch with the Angkorean and pre-Angkorean worlds; the northern and eastern sides were both less involved with the East–West trade and more in contact with the interior of Indochina and the various groups of people who lived there.

In general, then, 'Siam' (which hereafter is written without the quotation marks) experienced both singular and plural impingements from the world beyond. As a single unit, it experienced autonomy as Dvāravatī and dependency under Angkorean domination. As a distinctive culture area it also was characterised by a plurality of cultural and other influences, coming from its neighbours in all directions.

Over the course of three centuries, from the beginning of the eleventh century to the end of the thirteenth, Siam underwent profound changes. These were extremely complex, partly because different parts of the region were subject to different influences, partly because such a variety of peoples were involved, and partly because their economic, political, social and artistic dimensions are so interrelated and intermingled. We might characterise three stories of this period as representing the different experiences of the western, eastern and northern portions of Siam. They were different because of external pressures and internal rivalries that established a conflict that could be resolved only by the ascendancy of one portion over the others.

This article can deal effectively with only one of the three portions of Siam. However, first it seems desirable to summarise what seem to be the major outlines of developments in the other two, at which we will again glance at the end. Let us begin by setting up the definitions of the three regions. It is virtually impossible to do so intelligibly without using modern toponyms, so we must remind ourselves that these are intended to be only symbolic, to stand for particular local areas which gradually evolved into regions with the modern names.

The western side of Siam comprised mostly the lowlands stretching from somewhat north of Suphanburi down through Nakhòn Chaisi and Nakhòn Pathom to Kancanaburi, Ratburi and Phetburi, with an extension down the west coast of the Gulf of Siam to about the latitude of Chumphòn. Because of its location, on the seacoast and astride a long-established overland East–West trade route, this was the most cosmopolitan of the three regions. Internally, it was defined partly by a rice and manpower surplus in its northern part, and by local trade focusing on the fish and salt resources at the head of the Gulf. In time, it also came to be distinguished by a strong orientation to trade, and (from the eleventh and twelfth centuries) by Chinese immigration, spurred by growing international commerce.

The eastern side of Siam was very different in character. It included a string of old towns from Phromburi and Inburi through Lopburi to Pracinburi, and incorporated at various times what is now the southeast down perhaps as far as Canthaburi. Again because of its location, adjacent to the Angkorean domains to the east and southeast, this region was characterised by the strong influence of Angkor, in all its aspects. This region participated more fully than its more distant neighbours in the politics, culture and religion of Angkor, into which it was more fully integrated than its western

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and northern neighbours. It was troops from Lopburi (and nearby towns, presumably) that were depicted on the great military frieze at Angkor Wat, and Angkorean monumental remains and stone inscriptions were most densely concentrated on the ground in Lopburi and Pracinburi and surrounding areas. This region had a strong military and administrative focus, and was the most urbanised and urbane of the three, more sophisticated and wealthy and the most heavily dominated by 'Hindu' religion.

The northern third of Siam consisted of the upper valley of the Caophraya River and the lower ends of the Ping, Yom and Nan Rivers, and it must have ended where the steep mountains began. Its old towns included Tak and Kamphængphet on the west, Phitsanulok and Nakhòn Sawan in the south, and Sukhothai, Si Satcanalai and some locality in the Uttaradit region (Müang Rat?) in the north. The fact that it depended on upland salt wells (in the headwaters of the Nan River) and freshwater fish distinguished it from the other two regions. Culturally, ethnically and linguistically it was the most complex of the three, for it received a constant flow of people from the interior regions to its north, probably over a very long period of time; and this influx included a wide variety of peoples. We might imagine the region as having been highly assimilationist, but also as having been the most 'rustic' (some at the time would have said 'uncivilised') of the three. This was the 'frontier' region, and the most open to change and upheaval.

To cut short a story that needs examination in more detail, the period of the eleventh through fifteenth centuries is the period during which the three areas broke free from their overlords, and then competed to create and define Siam. In the end, the northern region was bested by a combination of the western and eastern regions; but in the long run the state that was to become 'Ayudhya' came to combine all three regions and all they stood for. That is, Lopburi and Phetburi combined to absorb first Suphanburi and then Sukhothai and the north; then, as Ayudhya, they ended the power of Angkor.

This complicated and dramatic process got its start in the northern region of the Central Plain, and it is northern Siam upon which the current effort will focus. While the process of moving from dependency to independence sometimes seems as simple as a forthright 'declaration of independence' and then military determination, it actually is and was much more complex.[5] Ultimately it can be understood only in terms of what we have to call intellectual change. What happened in the thinking of a small group of people that made them determine to take control of their own world? It cannot be dismissed as a mere 'innate' longing for 'freedom' on the part of human beings, for throughout history most people have lived in some degree of dependency, and even subjugation. It must have been easier for Ayudhya to have struck out on its own once Sukhothai had done so – but even then, it took Ayudhya several generations. What accounts for the daring innovations of Sukhothai in the thirteenth century?

### Northern Siam in the twelfth century – Dhānyapura

Before the twelfth century, northern Siam was not very important, for travellers and armies seem to have moved through it without bothering to mention it in the records that have survived, or leaving much there for later generations to dig up. The oldest chronicles mention early contacts between Lopburi and the northern uplands, as in the tale of Queen Cāmadevī of Haripuñjaya (Lamphun), for example;[6] or as in the confusing warfare which began the eleventh century and

5 'Declaration of independence' is, of course, a reference to the article by A.B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, 'A Declaration of Independence and Its Consequences', reprinted in the collected edition of their articles on Sukhothai epigraphy, *Epigraphic and Historical Studies* [henceforth *EHS*] (Bangkok: The Historical Society, 1992), pp. 1-42. The piece originally appeared in the *Journal of the Siam Society* [hereafter *JSS*], 56, 2 (July 1968): 207-50.

6 See Donald K. Swearer and Sommai Premchit, *The Legend of Queen Cama* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

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ended with the accession of King Sūryavarman I in Angkor; or as in the various legends about northern princes going to Lopburi for education in the thirteenth century. However, those sources contain no mention of the ground they covered or the people they might have encountered. At best, they were probably much more concerned with the Ping River valley north of Nakhòn Sawan to Kamphængphet and Tak than they were with the lower stretches of the Yom and Nan Rivers. The latter, at any rate, might have been too prone to violent and unexpected flooding when they suddenly burst down from the mountains to the north.

By the latter part of the twelfth century, Angkor had established a presence in the Ping valley north of Nakhòn Sawan, near the confluence of the Ping with the combined Yom and Nan where they form the Caophraya. In the 1950s a stone inscription was found there, at the village of Ban Map Makham (Bang Ta Ngai subdistrict, Banphotphisai district, Nakhòn Sawan province). Cœdès describes the scene as follows:

> At that place, named Dong Mæ Nang Müang, one can see the vestiges of a wall and of the moats of an ancient city, inside which have been found many mounds where the inhabitants of the neighbouring hamlets have found small terra cotta votive tablets [bearing] the effigy of the Buddha; one bronze statuette of a seated Buddha, its hands in the *abhayamudrā* [posture], with a well-developed conical hair-ornament, which belongs to the rather late Dvāravatī style; a stele representing the Buddha seated between Indra and Brahma, descending from the Thirty-third Heaven, of the same type as the accent stones found at Nakhòn Pathom, but of a very crude workmanship.[7]

Plate 1 The Buddha With Indra and Brahma (On the plate, the four images, running clockwise from the upper left, are respectively from Nakhòn Pathom, Dong Mæ Nang Müang, and two from Müang Fa Dæt in Kalasin province.)

7 G. Cœdès, 'Nouvelles données épigraphiques sur l'histoire de l'Indochine centrale', *Journal Asiatique*, 246 (1958): 132. The inscription is catalogued by the Venerable Maha Cham Thongkhamwan as no. 35, in *Prachum sīlā cārük* [Collected Inscriptions] III (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1965), pp. 12-18. The 'late Dvāravati' Buddha image found with it is pictured in Khien Yimsiri and Emcee Chand, *Thai Monumental Bronzes* (Bangkok: Khien Yimsiri, 1957), plate 20. The plates from the latter book, with much additional text in Thai, are also in: *Hānghunsūan Sāman Nitibukkhon Bunsong Phutthānusòn* [Buddhist Commemoration] (Bangkok, 1957). The rendering of the feet on this image is strongly reminiscent of the boundary stones of Müang Fā Dæt, Kalasin province (cf. plate 22). The same descent-from-heaven scene also appears at Müang Fa Dæt (Plate 1).

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There, almost five feet below the surface, were found a stone inscription, numerous votive tablets and a ceramic bowl which must have contained either bodily ash-remains (from a cremation) or holy relics. The inscription is on stone about 2 by 0.4 metres in size, with about 20 lines in the Pali language on the first face (of which only the first 10 can be read) and 33 lines in the Khmer language on the second face. The second face both duplicates and expands upon the fragmentary text of the first. According to Cœdès, this is the oldest full inscription in Pali found east of Burma.

Even before reading the inscription, already we can tell much about this region at the time of its writing. The site clearly was more than a village, for it was fortified with walls and a moat. As there is no evidence to the contrary, from the artistic remains we can assume this was a Buddhist site, with some vague continuities with earlier Dvāravatī times and perhaps with the Nakhòn Pathom region to the south. From the inclusion of representations of Indra and Brahma, it appears that the Buddhism of the area incorporated a broad Indic tradition.

Here, note particularly the stele described by Cœdès as 'representing the Buddha seated between Indra and Brahma, descending from the Thirty-third Heaven, of the same type as the accent stones found at Nakhòn Pathom, but of a very crude workmanship'.

Now we should let the inscription speak for itself. Remember that it begins with a face in Pali which is, however, only partially legible. Its text is repeated and extended on the reverse. Both faces are given below:

> • *Asokomahārājā dhammatejabasi vīra asamo sunattaṃ sāsanaṃ avoca dhātupūjakhettaṃ dadāhi tvaṃ sunatto nāma rājā sāsanaṃ saṅjāpetvā* … … [The *mahārājā* Aśoka, the Just, the Powerful, the Incomparably Brave has issued a royal order to King Sunatta as follows: He should arrange votive lands for the veneration of the Relic. King Sunatta therefore has the people to carry out the royal orders …… (remainder of face illegible)][8]
>
> Gift of the *mahārājādhirāja* who has the name Kuruṅ Śrī Dharmāśoka to the Holy Bodily Relic which is named Kamrateṅ Jagat Śrī Dharmāśoka, in the district of Dhānyapura, as in the following list:
>
> Venerables, persons belonging to all the divisions of the corporations, 2,012.
>
> Plates, two score[9]
>
> *Ceng* of silver, two score
>
> Elephants, one hundred
>
> Horses, one hundred
>
> Bulls, one hundred
>
> Litters, two
>
> Daily offerings, portions in the number of four score and ten [=90]
>
> A *mahāsenāpati* named Śrī Bhuvanāditya has borne an order of the *rājādhirāja* to Kuruṅ Sunat, who exercises authority at Dhānyapura, enjoining him to bestow the rice lands to accomplish the worship (*puja*) of the *kamrateṅ jagat* [= the relic].
>
> 1089 *śaka*, full moon of Māgha, Sunday, Purvāshādha lunar mansion, one measure of water after midday, Kuruṅ Sunat celebrated the worship of the *kamrateṅ jagat* and offered the rice lands affected, following this list: [full enumeration][10] Total lands transferred, five places.

8 The Pali face does not seem to have been published, except in *Prachum silā cārük*, III, p. 13; I have transcribed it from the Thai translation.

9 Since Cœdès makes two *bhay* equal 40, I render one *bhay* as a 'score', 20.

10 Only the Thai version (*Prachum silā cārük*, III, p. 15) gives the full list. Each of the rice-fields is delimited with reference to adjoining natural features, which all seem to have Khmer names.

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Cœdès has a very long footnote on the date, which is said to be equivalent to 5 February AD 1167, but it should probably be assigned to 4 February 1168.[11] The inscription records the gift of an endowment of land and various goods for the upkeep of an enshrined corporal relic (*śarīradhātu*) of the Buddha, which takes part of the name of the donor, Dharmāśoka.

It is not a simple matter to identify the ruler and the kingdom responsible for the Dhānyapura donation. Not every ruler would have styled himself a 'Great King-of-Kings' (*mahārājādhirāja*), nor would any but the largest (or most ambitious) have had 'Great Ministers' (*mahāsenāpati*). Cœdès, the only scholar to have written extensively about this inscription, considers all the obvious suspects. Given that the reverse of the stone is written in Khmer, we might expect that the inscription was the work of one of the major states which were leaving Khmer-language epigraphy in the eleventh century, namely Angkor and Lopburi. However, there is no evidence that Lopburi would have had the independence to have a *mahārājādhirāja and mahāsenāpati*, or that Angkor had any king who might have taken the name Dharmāśoka in any form. Cœdès then adduces the ingenious and seductive argument that the inscription was the work of none other than the king of Haripuñjaya (Lamphun), either Ādityarāja or his successor Dhammikarāja, whose dates fall in this period. He points out that Haripuñjaya practised Theravāda Buddhism of Pali-language expression, and that soon bilingual inscriptions in both Mōn and Pali would be engraved there. The Dhānyapura Inscription's use of Khmer rather than the Mōn of Haripuñjaya, he suggests, was the result of the widespread practice of putting inscriptions which were intended to be read, into the local language, in this case obviously Khmer. Furthermore, he argues, the Burmese and Mōn counted their years as current rather than elapsed years, like the Dhānyapura Inscription, unlike the Khmer who did the opposite. (J.C. Eade, however, insists this argument is fallacious.)

There is still more to recommend Haripuñjaya rather than Lopburi or Angkor as the source of the Dhānyapura Inscription. Cœdès points out that the first of the two kings he mentions, Ādityarāja, is remembered for his victorious resistance to military attacks coming from Lopburi, and for having enshrined in Lamphun a bodily relic of the Buddha that had first been worshipped by the famous Indian king Aśoka. Given the propensity for monarchs to be known by a variety of names during their reigns and, especially, in surviving historical records, it is far more likely for the Buddhist kings of Haripuñjaya to have been known as 'Aśoka' (Dhammāśokarāja) than for the supposedly Hinduised monarchs of Lopburi or Angkor to have been so styled.

On the other hand, Cœdès torpedoes his own argument in a footnote hurriedly appended to the article while it was in press. Having earlier discounted the possibility of Lopburi being independent of Angkor during this period and thus having either *mahārājādhirāja or mahāsenāpati*, he is forced to recognise new evidence that Lopburi sent its own diplomatic mission to China in 1155, separate from a mission from Angkor at the same time. Since conventionally, separate diplomatic missions to China are regarded *ipso facto* as evidence of political independence, the arguments against Lopburi dissolve. This being the case, and particularly because of the use of Khmer, Lopburi makes better sense than Lamphun does (and we will explore some of the ramifications of this below).[12]

11 I have considerable difficulty with Cœdès' date, which he says Roger Billard has worked out, citing a long letter from Billard explaining his difficulties with it. He resolves the problem by arguing that the year number is expressed in elapsed rather than current years, making it possible to place the inscription in the month Māgha of 1088 rather than 1089 of the *Mahāśakarāja* Era. The computer program for the Macintosh by Lars Gislén (called 'SEAC' latest version 3.7.7), based on the book by J. C. Eade, shows no such lunar mansion on a Sunday in the middle of any month in any year anywhere near 1167. (See J. C. Eade, *The Calendrical Systems of Mainland Southeast Asia* [Handbuch der Orientalistik 3 Abt., Bd. 9; Leiden: Brill, 1995]). Moreover, Eade informs me (personal communication, April 1997) that he knows of no instances in this region when the current/elapsed difference is applicable. Given these difficulties, the most likely date for the inscription seems to me to be 4 February 1168, a Sunday - a day on which the Purvāshādha lunar mansion began late in the day. This was, however, the tenth day of the waning moon of the month of Māgha, not the full-moon day.

12 Indeed, in the final edition of his *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, tr. Susan Brown Cowing, ed. Walter F. Vella (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1968), p. 163, Cœdès expresses his preference for Lopburi rather than Haripuñjaya.

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What can we conclude from this?

First, we have to assume that the population in the environs around the confluence of the Ping and Caophraya Rivers was using the Khmer language as a lingua franca. This does not mean that they were necessarily 'Khmer' in ethnicity: it testifies only to their then-recent experience of living within a Khmer-language environment, where Khmer speakers had prestige and were fashionable, or where that language had economic and/or political utility.

Second, we can be certain that the Dhānyapura region was practising Buddhism of the Theravāda sort, marked especially by the use of the Pali language. Just as some American college diplomas as recently as the 1960s were written in Latin, Pali was used in solemn Theravāda religious contexts, as if one could best communicate with Buddha by addressing Him in His own language!

Third, mainly because all the indications are that the whole of northern Siam was consistently subject more to Angkor than to any other power, the likelihood is strong that Dhānyapura in 1168 was being treated as an outlying district of Lopburi. We know that as recently as 1155 Lopburi was attempting to act independently of Angkor, to which it had been subordinate for much of the preceding century and a half. We know that the official, administrative language of Lopburi during this period was Khmer, rather than Mōn, and that Lopburi had become very Khmerised, to the point of figuring prominently in Angkor's court life and politics.

Cœdès also reminds us that this was a period during which Lopburi was at war, not only with Angkor but also with Haripuñjaya. The whole central portion of the Indochina Peninsula seems to have dissolved in confusion between the death of the great King Sūryavarman II (r. 1113–c. 1150) and the advent of Jayavarman VII in 1181.[13] During this thirty-year period, Lopburi tried to assert its independence from Angkor. In order to do so successfully, it needed the resources (particularly manpower) that would enable it to at least hold its own against Angkor. It probably strengthened its control over the western and northern parts of the Central Plain, but even together these regions could not match the resources of Angkor. And so Lopburi went further afield, including the rich and populous region of Haripuñjaya. The chronicles of the region in this period, which date from much later, preserve the memory of three Kamboja or Lopburi invasions of the Haripuñjaya region, each of which was resisted successfully by King Ādityarāja.

Whatever the actual details and dates of this warfare, it must necessarily have involved the region where Dhānyapura was located, for the chief route between Lopburi and Haripuñjaya was up the Caophraya and the Ping, within close reach of Dhānyapura. It would have been very important for the contenders in this warfare to have maintained a strong military presence there, especially for Lopburi's defensive posture and for Haripuñjaya's offensive tactics. Although put into this context, the inscription could be read either way, it would seem that the inscription reflects Lopburi's desire to do whatever was necessary to hold Dhānyapura against Haripuñjaya, rather than the latter holding the area against the former. This interpretation is suggested by the Khmer terminology of the inscription (especially the Khmer-style title for Buddha's bodily relic), but even more so by the curiously second-handed way in which the donation of endowments to the relic is handled. It was done through the bureaucracy, through a minister, without the direct participation of King Dhammāśoka himself. The likelihood is that the Lopburi ruler, desperate to strengthen his polity in all possible ways, was making major religious concessions to the Khmer-speaking but culturally alien Buddhist population of the Dhānyapura region, in an attempt to keep them loyal.

One major implication of the Dhānyapura Inscription, then, is that Theravāda Buddhism was so well established there that a weak overlord could not consider ignoring it. Indeed, the same Buddhism seems to have been in the process of becoming established in Lopburi itself at about the

13 Ibid., p. 163.

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same period. It is important to note this early adoption of Theravāda, in order to counter the impression often given that such Buddhism is characteristic mainly of the period a century later.

### Northern Siam and the Angkor of Jayavarman VII

The two decades bracketing the date of the Dhānyapura Inscription were particularly difficult, even painful, for the rulers and people of Angkor, as probably was true for most of their neighbours as well. This was a period of frequent war, centring particularly on the ancient kingdom of Champa on the south-central coast of what is now Viet Nam. After the death of the powerful and long-lived Sūryavarman II, two troublesome reigns were followed by the usurpation of a court official, Traibhuvanāditya. As if the secession of the Lopburi region around mid-century had not been enough, Angkor was caught up in wars with Champa that culminated with the Cham capture and sack of Angkor in 1177. Cœdès points out that the Cham victory had the effect of clearing the stage of the usurper, opening the way for the recovery of the Angkorean kingdom under Jayavarman VII. That king had immediately to cope with a revolt in the region near the capital, and then to go to war against Champa for four years before finally pacifying his own country and assuming the throne of Angkor in 1181.[14]

Jayavarman must have been a mature man by the time he became king, and for virtually all his adult life, Angkor had been divided, at war, and beset with internal difficulties. Such unhappy memories must have weighed on his mind as he framed and executed the policies of his reign, which despite his advanced age was to endure for nearly forty years.[15] One might expect him to have concentrated on internal unification, doing all within his power to ensure that the calamities of his earlier years were not repeated. He had a very broad swath of territory with which to be concerned, from Champa and Dai Viet to the east to Siam and especially Lopburi to the west and the northern portions of the Malay Peninsula to the southwest. He said little directly about his policies, but much is evident from his actions and from his inscriptions.

Jayavarman VII was exceptionally busy as a builder of monuments. He is remembered as the builder of Angkor Thom, but he built much more than that, both within his capital and some distance away, even as far as the vicinity of what is modern Vientiane, in Laos. Moreover, he built highways linking his capital to important centres in the east, the north and (presumably) the west, along which he constructed resthouses and hospitals. Though his inscriptions mention Champa and Phimai as termini of his roads, however, they do not mention Lopburi. Moreover, though the kings of Dai Viet, Champa and even Java are supposed to have owed him fealty, Lopburi is not so dignified.

We know that Lopburi was included within the Angkorean empire of Jayavarman VII, for it is included both on contemporary lists of his possessions and in Chinese records dating from the period. One might conclude that Lopburi was treated as an integral part of his empire like Phimai, not as a tributary. Moreover, there is good reason to suppose that he diminished the status of Lopburi by tying numerous principalities, or city-states, in the three zones of Siam directly to Angkor, rather than having them render their allegiance second-hand through Lopburi, which at times in the past may have served as a provincial capital of Angkor for the western regions.

14 Ibid., pp. 169-70.

15 Cœdès thought Jayavarman VII had been born no later than 1125, and was around 55 years old when he became king (ibid., p. 169). He would therefore have been 90-95 years old when he perished around 1219. This fact gives pause to Pierre Lamant, 'Pour une nouvelle problématique du règne de Jayavarman VII', *Asie du Sud-Est et Monde Insulindien*, 15, 1-4 (1984): 104. His article goes on to underline the desperate defensive quality of the period, a salutary corrective to the usual writing about the reign. On the death of Jayavarman, see also O. W. Wolters, 'Tambralinga', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 21, 3 (1958): 607 n.

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A good view of Jayavarman's policies towards the outlying regions can be glimpsed in the 1191 Prah Khan Inscription associated with a major religious complex in the Angkor region.[16] Of primary interest here is the last portion of the inscription, which has four sections that might indicate these policies. First, there is a section detailing the king's consecration of religious images including special Buddha images called *Jayabuddhamahānātha*, bearing what is thought to have been the king's facial likeness on a bodily form representing the Buddha.

CXIV. At Śrī Jayantapura, at Vindhyaparvata, and at Markhalpura, in each of these places,[17] the king erected the Three Jewels.

CXV. Śrī Jayarājadhānī,[18] Śrī Jayantanagarī, Jayasimhavatī, Śrī Jayaviravatī,

CXVI. Lavodayapura,[19] Svarnapura,[20] Śambūkapattana,[21] Jayarājapurī,[22] Śrī Jayasimhapurī,[23]

CXVII. Śrī Jayavajrapurī [Phetburi], Śrī Jayastambhapuri, Śrī Jayarājagiri, Śrī Jayavīrapurī,

CXVIII. Śrī Jayavajravatī, Śrī Jayakirtipurī, Śrī Jayakśemapurī, Śrī Vijayādipurī,[24]

CXIX. Śrī Jayasimhagrāma, Madhyamagrāmaka, Samarendragrāma, Śrī Jayapurī,

CXX. Vihārottaraka, Pūrvāvāsa, in each of these 23 sanctuaries,

CXXI. the king erected the blessed *Jayabuddhamahānātha*, as well as ten pavilions for offerings on the banks of the tank of Yaśodhara.

The inscription next goes on to the highways to Champa and to Phimai, which the king had constructed to connect the capital with outlying areas. (Was there a highway to the west? Perhaps the absence of one is telling us that the chief means of transportation in what is now central Thailand was by water, not by land.) One of the unnoticed puzzles of this passage is that one road is said to have run 'From the capital' (CXXIII) … to Yaśodharapura (CXXV)' - in other words, from Angkor to Angkor?

16 G. Cœdès, 'La stèle du Práh Khan d'Aṅkor', *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* [hereafter *BEFEO*], 41 (1941): 295–9.

17 Cœdès' notes on this verse simply refer to other epigraphic references to these localities, without guesses as to where they might have been located.

18 Cœdès only states that this might have been a provisional residence of the king, occupied while Yaśodharapura was being renovated and enlarged.

19 There is no doubt that Lopburi (Lavo) is indicated, particularly as the toponyms that follow all are located in the same general area.

20 Suphanburi seems indicated.

21 Cœdès notes that 'The name of Çāmbūka is found in the pre-Angkorean epoch in an inscription engraved on a statue of the Buddha belonging, by its style, to the school of Dvaravati, dug up … Lopburi' (Cœdès, *Recueil des inscriptions du Siam II* [Bangkok: Department of Fine Arts, 1961], p. 14). He suggests that it must be located in the Menam valley, but is no more definite. Phòngsi and Thiwa, *Müang bōrān*, p. 46, code no. 10.2, locate this place at Ban Pong in Ratburi province. They follow, among others, M.C. Subhadradis Diskul, 'Silā cārūk prasāt Phra Khan' [The Inscription of Phra Khan], *Sinlapakòn*, 10, 2 (July 1966): 56; he, however, quotes Tri Amatyakul without agreeing with him. The same article (p. 61) gives a plan of the supposed Sambūkapattana site.

22 Clearly Ratburi (Rājapurī), as Cœdès thought.

23 Given the logic of this list, if it is in some rough geographical order, then this must be the Müang Singburi of the Prasat Müang Sing in Kancanaburi province, rather than the Singburi northwest of Ayudhya. On this site, see *Rāingān kānkhuttāēng læ būrana Prasāt Müang Sing* [Report on the Excavation and Restoration of Prasat Müang Sing], ed. Raphisak Chatchawan (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1977).

24 For most of the rest of the toponyms in stanzas CXVII through CXIX Cœdès is unable to come up with identifications (nor have later scholars been able to do so).

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CXXII. On the routes from Yaśodharapura to the capital of Campā, [he constructed] 57 rest-houses with hearths.[25]

CXXIII. From the capital to the city of Vimāy [Phimai],[26] [there were] 17 lodgings with hearths. From the capital to Jayavatī, from that city to Jayasimhavatī,

CXXIV. from there to Jayavīravatī, from that city to Jayarājagiri, from Jayarājagiri to Śri Suvīrapurī,

CXXV. from that city to Yaśodharapura [along this route] there were 14 lodgings with hearths. There was one at Śrī Sūryaparvata,

CXXVI. one at Śrī Vajayādityapura, one at Kalyānasiddhika; total 121 [stage-lodgings].

Third came a section detailing the king's donations intended to support the religious institutions and to underwrite the costs associated with annual ceremonies.

CXLI. The king and the proprietors of villages have piously donated: 8,176 villages;

CXLII. [There,] there are 208,532 men and women slaves of the gods, among whom there are:

CXLIII. 923 overseers,

6,465 workers,

CXLIV. 4,332 women, including 1,622 dancers.

Finally comes a section of the inscription specifying the annual observances in which the above three elements were involved:

CLVIII. Each year, in the month of Phālguna,[27] the following gods must be brought here: the king of the Munis of the East, Śrī Jayarājacūdāmanī,[28]

CLIX. the Jayabuddhamahānātha of the 25 countries,[29] the Sugata Śrī Vīraśakti, the Sugata Vimāya,

CLX. Bhadreśvara,[30] Cāmpeśvara,[31] Prthuśaileśvara,[32] etc., a total of 122 gods with the divinities of their entourage.[33]

CLXI - CLXIII. Here are the shares for the divine service which must take place on that occasion in the warehouses of the king:

...

CLXVI. The brahmans, beginning with Śrī Sūryabhatta, the king of Java, the king of the Yavana,[34] [and] the two kings of the Chams[35] each day bore with piety the water of ablutions.

25 For Cœdès on these edifices, see above, and "Les gîtes d'étape à la fin du XIIe siècle", *BEFEO*, 40 (1940): 347. I have written 'hearth' rather than 'fire' here, so as to retain some ambiguity, as the fire or hearth can have either a sacerdotal or a domestic connotation.

26 I am told that this route can still be traced from the air.

27 Usually in early March.

28 Cœdès: The mother of Jayavarman VII, deified at Ta Prohm under the traits of the Prajñapāramitā.

29 Above it is only 23, not 25.

30 Cœdès: Name of one of the oldest Śaivite divinities venerated in Cambodia, notably at Vat Phu.

31 Cœdès: Vaishnavite divinity very frequently mentioned, notably in the stele of Phimanakas, st. LXXXVIII, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, I (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1937), p. 139.

32 Cœdès: Śaivite divinity mentioned under the name of Prahvadri in the Phimanakas inscription (st. LXXXVIII) and from the eleventh century in the stele of Prah Nok (st. C, XXXII and LI).

33 Here 'gods' seems to refer to images of stone or metal.

34 Cœdès (*Indianized States*, p. 172) is generally followed in interpreting 'Yavana' as meaning the Vietnamese. It is worth asking whether the reference might instead be to a kingdom in the north of Siam, or even specifically to Yonok or Haripuñjaya.

35 Cœdès: This reference to the 'two kings of the Chams' is enough to date the inscription within the period 1190 to 1192, when those kings reigned; see Georges Maspéro, *Le royaume de Champa* (Paris & Brussels: G. Van Oest, 1928), p. 165.

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There is an important logic to this sequence of subjects, which might be summarised as follows. What the inscription seems to be saying is that the king, wishing to knit his empire together with religious loyalties, commissioned a variety of religious monuments and (especially) images, including but not restricted to Buddha images which each year were to be brought (or more portable replicas of them brought) to Angkor for special ceremonies in the month of March, before the new year began at the end of that month. The images would be ritually lustrated in ceremonies in which the vassal kings would take leading roles,[36] the participants thereby honouring both the various deities represented by the images and also the king and the capital, which were symbolically or actually present. Supporting the ongoing worship of both, presumably throughout the year, were endowments, which included (but were not restricted to) slaves in very considerable numbers. In order to facilitate the annual journey to the capital, highways were constructed along the main routes of travel and were appropriately provided with amenities.

One of the conclusions to be drawn from the portion of the Prah Khan inscription quoted above is that envoys of each of the 23 (or 25) towns or cities represented by a *Jayabuddhamahānātha* had to make an annual trip to Angkor, where they were called upon to demonstrate their loyalty to the king. Although they came annually for a ritual occasion, they must also have had the opportunity to engage in political relations. It must have been on such an occasion that a local ruler might be conferred a title, or given an Angkorean 'princess' in marriage, or loaded with valuable presents such as a sword or a fine horse.

It would be neater if we might specifically identify northern Siam towns with the list given in the inscription. Unfortunately, only about six of the twenty-three towns have been identified, and all six are in the eastern and western, but not the northern, parts of Siam: Lavodayapura (Lopburi), Svarnapura (Suphanburi), Śambūkapattana (somewhere in the vicinity of Ratburi), Jayarājapurī (Ratburi), Śrī Jayasimhapurī (perhaps Prasat Müang Sing in Kanchanaburi province), and Śrī Jayavajrapurī (Phetburi). The likelihood is strong that the remaining place names include several towns in northern Siam, as one Buddha image that appears to be a *Jayabuddhamahānātha* image has been found at what is now Sukhothai.

That brings us back to the northern end of Siam, and to the question of what it meant that that region appears to have been expressing some form of Buddhism by the middle of the twelfth century. Remember that the Dhānyapura (Nakhòn Sawan) inscription was in the Pali and Khmer

36 I prefer this interpretation of the 'waters of ablutions' to Cœdès' insistence that Jayavarman's bathwater was carried by the kings of Vietnam, Champa, and Java. It hinges on the reading of the Sanskrit word *snānāmvudhāriṇaḥ* (Sanskrit text, p. 282, st. CLXVI), which Sir Monier Monier-Williams (*A Sanskrit–English Dictionary* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899], p. 1266) defines as 'a bathing, ablution, religious or ceremonial lustration (as of an idol &c.), bathing in sacred waters'. It would appear that Cœdès went for the 'bathing' and 'ablution' alternatives, while I am opting for 'religious or ceremonial lustration (as of an idol &c.)'. It seems likely to me that he was using an old-fashioned Sanskrit–French dictionary which lacked an adequate definition.

In "La stèle du Práh Khan", Cœdès earlier gives a nice overview of the ceremonies, referring to the '… annual *fête* which was celebrated there in Phalguna in the presence of a grand concourse of divinities' (XLVIII–CLX):
'At Ta Prohm, the annual *fête*, comporting as at Prah Khan the reunion of a large number of images, took place the following month (Caitra) according to stanzas LXXXIII and ff. of the stele of Ta Prohm. We might suppose that these dates corresponded to anniversaries: the birth or death of the parents of the king deified in the two temples. As for the statues assembled on these occasions, it is probable that these were, not real statues, but smaller reproductions, doubtless of metal, corresponding to that which the Indian treatises of iconography call *utsavamūrti*. It might better be [rendered] by an equivalent term, that of *yātradeva* (for *yātra*°) by which the inscription of Ta Prohm designates idols re-assembled in the sanctuary on the occasion of the annual *fête*. …'
'The text concludes its enumeration by saying that the water of daily ablutions was furnished by Sūryabhatta and the other brahmans, by the king of Java, the king of the Yavana, and the two kings of Champa. …' (The rest deals with the identification of these kings.)

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languages, and that it centred on the endowment of a bodily relic of the Buddha by a ruler who may have been the Buddhist ruler of a briefly independent Lopburi. Now, with the Prah Khan inscription of Jayavarman VII we have one or more Buddha images sent to the region which bear his physical likeness and which were to be ritually brought (or their representatives brought) each year to ceremonies at Angkor. There seems to be general agreement that such images were placed in 'chapels' and other scattered locations in the Bayon (at Angkor). At least 40 such locations have been identified, associated with inscriptions that list the officials and royalty who set up their images there. At least two of the locations were sites for *Jayabuddhamahānātha* images.[37]

At first glance this might seem to indicate a degree of continuity from Dhānyapura to Prah Khan, but that connection is illusory. It is illusory because the Buddhism of Dhānyapura and the Buddhism of Jayavarman VII were completely different. The former appears to have been a popular religion, involving what must have been Theravāda traditions (judging from the Pali expression in Dhanyāpura), while the latter was an elite cult of Mahāyāna expression in Sanskrit at Angkor. Jayavarman VII is known to have been a serious Mahāyānist, devoted (according to the inscriptions) to the Lokeśvara Bodhisattva. Even more to the point is his commissioning of images bearing his physical form. This reads like an ultimately clumsy attempt to co-opt Buddhism for political purposes, for assistance in enhancing the social and political solidarity of the empire.

At the least, Jayavarman's actions speak to the importance he ascribed to the various provinces he was attempting to hold within the empire. As concerned as he was with military security, he has to have recognised the strategic significance of northern Siam. This region was important as a strategic bulwark against military threats that might be descending onto the plain from the main river systems that extended north- and northwestward to the various increasingly powerful societies of the uplands.

Over the past century, scholars have tended to be overly impressed with the power of Jayavarman VII. His military achievements, especially against the Chams, certainly were prodigious feats, and so were his monumental constructions. Moreover, he was, according to the conventional view, exceptionally long-lived: he is said to have come to the throne in 1181 when he was about 55 years of age, and not to have died until c. 1218/19, when he would have been more than 90 (though his inscriptions extend barely past 1200). It is hard to not take seriously a ruler who left such eloquent and fulsome inscriptions (which incidentally are filled with his praise); but it is all too easy to underestimate the extent to which Jayavarman VII was on the defensive as much as he was on the offensive. He was increasingly worried about the marchlands to his west. They were of concern to him not least because they were gaining rapidly in economic strength, a strength that was attested indirectly by the growth and brief flourishing of Chên-li-fu, and directly by the rapid development of a new ceramics industry in the region of major international dimensions.

There were more than security concerns at stake. We must here consider the possibility that

37 G. Cœdès, 'Études cambodgiennes, XIX: La date du Bàyon', BEFEO, 28 (1928): 81-146. The 40 inscriptions (collectively catalogued as K.293) are given there in transcription but not in translation (pp. 104-12). K.293.3 mentions the *Jayabuddhamahānātha* of 'Çrījayarājapurī' (Ratburi), and K.293.6 that of 'Çrījayavajrapura' (Phetburi). Pises Jiajanpong points out that the inscriptions at the Bayon at Angkor say 'The Jaya Buddha Mahanatha of Vajrapuri is established here' and 'The Jaya Buddha Mahanatha of Rajapuri is established here', casting doubt on the idea that the Buddha images ever were sent to the provinces ('Reflections on Müang Sing', tr. Michael Wright, in Suchit Wongthet and Pises Jiajanpong, *Müang Sing læ Prasāt Müang Sing* [Bangkok: Fine Arts Dept., 1987], p. 78). My view is that replicas of the images, which unlike the images themselves were portable, were set up at these spots in the capital for the duration of the annual ceremonies. That the *Jayabuddhamahānātha* images were sent to the provinces is attested by their discovery at provincial sites such as Sukhothai and Phimai. See also Hiram W. Woodward, Jr, 'The *Jayabuddhamahānātha* Images of Cambodia', *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 52/53 (1994/95): 105-11.

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northern Siam was of economic significance as well. The impression of an unsettled and transitional phase in the history of Siam is reinforced by a brief flurry of Chinese records concerning Siam that suddenly appears in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. These records were reviewed only once, by O. W. Wolters in 1960,[38] and since then have been almost forgotten. They should not have been ignored, for they shed important light on conditions in Siam around 1200.

The records come from the *Sung hui yao k'ao*, which is a compilation of Sung-era sources compiled by Hsü Sung in 1809-10. Scholars close to the Chinese (Sung) court may have compiled the relevant portion of the texts in August 1216.[39] The main pretext for the collection of information on 'Chên-li-fu' seems to have been a brief series of diplomatic exchanges between it and the Sung court in the years 1200-05. It is primarily on that diplomatic intercourse that the materials are centred, but in the process of conveying that information, quite a bit is said about Chên-li-fu itself.

As in many such Chinese sources, the exact location of Chên-li-fu is by no means certain. The source makes it clear, however, that Chên-li-fu lies along a string of coastal areas running from Champa past Angkorean Cambodia and 'Bo-si-lan' (for another five days) to Chên-li-fu. This being the case, the area at the head of the Gulf of Siam is indicated; and the source makes it clear that it must have centred on a seaport. In his discussion of its location, Wolters reviews lengthy scholarship on the question, as well as the evidence of the *Sung hui yao k'ao*, but concludes with less than a definitive identification. The best he can do is to argue that the actual capital of Chên-li-fu lay at some (indeterminate) distance from the sea, and that Chên-li-fu included both a port city and an inland capital. He further argues that it has to be localised west of the Canthabun coast – now south-eastern Thailand – and north of the Malay Peninsula realm centred in the region of Nakhòn Si Thammarat. Since Nakhòn Si Thammarat, as the polity of Tambralinga, never controlled areas north of present-day Chumphòn, we could imagine Chên-li-fu dominating the coastal region extending from Pracuapkhirikhan northwards to the mouth of the Tha Cin River, and up that river perhaps as far even as present-day Suphanburi.

The work of Phòngsi and Thiwa on the changing coastline of the region at the head of the Gulf of Siam injects an additional ingredient into the definition of the possible extent of Chên-li-fu (Map 1). They argue that there are no remains of old cities in the vast region extending northwards from the present coastline to somewhat north of Ayudhya, and that what is now the heart of the Central Plain was at best a swamp, at least soggy and inundated much of the year. In contrast, they indicate numerous ruins of older cities and towns on the western fringe of the Central Plain, above an elevation of 3.5 metres or so today, while they note the presence of few such ruins on the eastern fringe of the Central Plain. Wolters also notes that early Chinese navigators rarely visited the eastern coast of the Bay of Bangkok (in the present-day region of Chonburi).[40] All this together suggests that we might look for Chên-li-fu to have been a state centred on Ratburi, Nakhòn Chaisi, or even Suphanburi.

The information provided by the Chinese sources suggests what Cœdès called an 'Indianised' state. Inhabited by people who 'tend to follow the law of the Buddha',[41] they were apparently highly literate, for they wrote documents in 'white powder' (possibly with steatite or soapstone 'pencils') on a black background. The memorial their ruler sent to China in 1200 was not in a language and/or

38 O.W. Wolters, 'Chên-li-fu, a state on the gulf of Siam at the beginning of the 13th century', *JSS*, 48, 2 (Nov. 1960): 1-36.
39 Ibid., notes 1 and 2.
40 Ibid., pp. 14-15.
41 Ibid., p. 2.

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script with which the Chinese were familiar – a script 'very similar to music notation'.[42] One memorial written personally by the ruler in gold was also copied out in the language of Malabari Indians, whom Wolters considers to have been Brahmans in royal service.[43]

Chên-li-fu enjoyed a certain measure of prosperity. The opening lines of the Chinese account depict a state whose ruler lived in a palace, used golden utensils, and was clad in lavish silks and gauzes. His court was structured by protocol and comprised a variety of officials. Their prosperity was based at least in part on trade, including regular supplies of red gauze and pottery from Chinese ships. Among the commodities available to generate the income to purchase such imports were such local products as ivory, rhinoceros horn, beeswax, lac, cardamoms and ebony-wood.[44] Both the ingredients of 'Indianisation' and the sources of its prosperity are consistent with a polity located at the northwest head of the Gulf of Siam.

The Chinese were ignorant of just when Chên-li-fu had been founded as a state, but noted that the ruler in 1200 had reigned for 20 years, that is, since about 1180. Since his embassies to China date only from 1200, we might assume that he was not fully free to act independently of others until that time. The source of his earlier restraint might be suggested in his title, which has been only partially identified: Mo-lo-pa's Kamrateñ Añ Śrī Fan-hui-chih. For the moment, the key operative element is the *kamrateñ*. That title was commonly used in late Angkorean times for royalty; and Wolters notes that the Yüan Dynasty applied it to the rulers of Sukhothai and Phetburi.[45] Unfortunately, we know nothing about what 'Mo-lo-pa' and 'Fan-hui-chih' might have represented. We are told that Chên-li-fu 'administers more than 60 settlements',[46] which, given the relatively constricted area with which we are concerned, seems appropriate for a state located on the western fringe of the Central Plain (or 'swamp' in this period!).

After a second mission in 1202, a third was sent to China by Chên-li-fu in 1205, this time by a king with a slightly different name, which can be rendered, according to Wolters, as Śrī Mahīdharavarman.[47] This ruler asked to be allowed to present tribute annually to the Sung but was rebuffed, and Chên-li-fu is not mentioned further in the surviving Chinese sources.

On their first mission to China, the Chên-li-fu envoys were given red gauze and skeined (raw?) silk in return for the tribute they had presented the emperor. The text also notes that the Chinese officials were ordered 'to buy the pottery which the envoys had wanted and to present it to them'.[48] Pottery is not mentioned in connection with the second and third missions. The question of pottery is significant because, as we shall see, increasingly fine Chinese-style ceramics were being produced not far up the same river along which we imagine that Chên-li-fu was located. Were the Chên-li-fu people seeking models upon which to base their own productions? Or was Chên-li-fu temporarily cut off from its chief source of pottery by its new-found political independence? We will deal with the ceramics question presently; let us for the moment address the issue of political relations.

As noted above, it has become axiomatic in the study of early Southeast Asian history that the sending of tribute missions to the Chinese court can be taken as an indication of independence, or a bid for independence, by the sender. How are we to read the sending of Chên-li-fu's three missions to China in 1200, 1202 and 1205? Was it then, if only briefly, independent? Or was it only a polity

42 Ibid., p. 4.
43 Ibid., p. 16.
44 Ibid., p. 1.
45 Ibid., p. 24, n. 8; and Sachchidanand Sahai, *Les institutions politiques et l'organisation administrative du Cambodge ancien (VIe–XIIIe siècles)* (Publ. de l'EFEO, LXXV; Paris: EFEO, 1970), pp. 19-20.
46 Wolters, 'Chên-li-fu', p. 1.
47 Ibid., p. 5.
48 Ibid., p. 4.

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that wanted to be independent?

Whatever may have been involved politically – and it surely was much – Chên-li-fu also must have had a good deal at stake economically. The area where it is thought to have been located, around the northwestern corner of the Gulf of Siam, is not intrinsically rich. Historically, its economic significance lay in its position astride the trade routes up the rivers towards Burma (and the Three Pagodas Pass) and towards Suphanburi and the northern part of the Caophraya valley. With the rapid upsurge in Chinese overseas trade during this period, it would have been natural for Chên-li-fu to have attempted to establish regular relations with the rapidly rising commercial power of the South China Sea. It would thereby have been capitalising on its excellent internal communications.

There may have been more to Chên-li-fu's economy than that. Given what we shall see presently about the growing ceramics industry that lay up the Tha Cin (or Suphanburi) River from the head of the Gulf, it is difficult to avoid the implication that this must have been the route through which that exquisite pottery was exported. This might account for the envoys' interest in obtaining Chinese 'samples', and serve also to suggest that Chên-li-fu's sudden bid for independence may have had some economic impetus behind it.

We can be reasonably certain that whatever success Chên-li-fu had was relatively short-lived, for by 1225, when the Chinese superintendent of trade at Canton wrote his *Chu-fan-chih*, Chên-li-fu was a simple province of the Angkorean empire; and by 1349, when Wang Ta-yuan was writing his *Tao-i chih liao*, Chên-li-fu was not even mentioned.[49] Given the *Kamrateṅ añ* title borne by the king of Chên-li-fu, it is probable that the Chinese records simply reflect a brief period between 1200 and 1205 when Chên-li-fu was attempting to assert its independence of Angkor and/or Lopburi.

It is in this light that we might consider the possibility that the interest of the Chên-li-fu envoys in Chinese 'pottery' conceivably could be interpreted in commercial terms – that they wished to secure samples of the wares of 'the competition', or at least samples of the latest designs. We will never know for certain the exact objective of their pottery interests.

Somewhat more intriguing is a solitary, unconnected reference in some materials from Nakhòn Si Thammarat on the Malay Peninsula. These have to do with a king, Śrī Mahesvastidrādhirājakṣatriya, reigning at Phetburi in a year that has been interpreted as AD 1204.[50] This is not the 'Mahīdharavarman' reconstructed by Wolters and Cœdès, but it is enough like it to be interesting. According to the Nakhòn Si Thammarat chronicles, this ruler entered into trading relations with China. Among other things, he sent troops and what amounted to colonists both to the south and to the north, to the region of present-day Chainat, which is on Map 1 as Phræk Si Racha. The polity centred on Phetburi thus was extended far to the north and south, but not along an East–West axis, all of which tends to correspond to information found in the Chinese source on Chên-li-fu.

49 Friedrich Hirth and W. W. Rockhill, *Chau Ju-kua: His Work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth centuries, entitled Chu-fan-chï* (St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1911; Taipei (reprint): Ch'eng Wen Publishing Co., 1965), p. 53; W. W. Rockhill, 'Notes on the Relations and Trade of China', *T'oung Pao*, 16 (1915): 61-159. I fail to understand how Angkor might have controlled Tambralinga in 1225 without controlling 'Chia-lo-hsi' (Grahi), which is thought to have lain in the Chaiya region. I worry that such Chinese sources sometimes copied uncritically from previous writers.

50 The source of this date is Phra Bòrihan Thepthani, *Phongsāwadān chāt Thai* [Chronicle of the Thai Nation] (Bangkok: Pracak Witthaya, 1965) vol II, pp. 13-16. The episode is in David K. Wyatt, *The Crystal Sands: The Chronicles of Nagara Sri Dharrmaraja* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1975), pp. 102-5.

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During the same period, Lopburi seems to have remained firmly under Angkor's control, owing not least to the fact that its governor (or 'lord') was a son of King Jayavarman VII.[51] Lopburi thus was not inclined at this time to revolt against Angkor, which it did under other lords both earlier and later. What does all of this add up to? At the least, in the first years of the thirteenth century a section of what we earlier described as western Siam temporarily broke free of Angkor's control. Wolters suggests that Chên-li-fu's diplomatic self-assertion 'should be interpreted against the background of a long tradition of disquiet in the western half of Suryavarman II's "double kingdom"'.[52] This also occurred at a time when the Angkorean emperor was beset by increasingly fractious vassals and neighbours, including especially the Chams.[53] It must be emphasised that this was not simply a political or dynastic challenge, although those aspects would have been viewed by Angkor as troubling. It was also expressive of two other currents of change that would ultimately overwhelm the Cambodian monarchs: economic change involving particularly the ceramics trade and overseas trade with China, and religious and intellectual change.

### The ceramics industry of Siam

By 1200, the northern end of Siam, watered by the Yom and Nan Rivers, was densely settled by the standards of the day. Considering just the region north from Phitsanulok to where the rivers meet the mountains, there were four towns important enough to have had major buildings constructed: Phitsanulok, Sukhothai, Si Satcanalai and Kamphængphet, all within a span of about 60 miles (100 km). These were all sites of buildings of the Khmer-influenced style known as *prang*, devoted to the worship of the brahmanical deities, especially Śiva and Vishnu.

The ambitious beauty of their religious monuments, including pre-Buddhist ones, in turn raises the question of the means by which this region earned its prosperity and its importance. It had considerable agricultural potential, to be sure. It was located where the annual inundations were neither so great as to cause damage, nor so small as to be a source of agricultural weakness.[54] Throughout this region, almost to the foot of the mountains along its fringe, the terrain is quite flat and well-watered. Ram Khamhæng might well say of it by century's end, 'This land of Sukhothai is good. There are fish in the waters and rice in the fields.'[55]

But there was more to the region's economic life than agriculture and fishing. Particularly in the Yom River valley stretching just north of Si Satcanalai there were fine clay deposits which were being worked by 1200 and which by 1300 would begin to supply an international trade in fine pottery extending as far afield as the Philippines, China, Borneo, Java and South Asia. This may have begun as a small, local industry; but by the fourteenth century it would keep more than 100 kilns going at any one time.

It needs repeating that the ceramics industry may have been booming in the fourteenth century, but it was not yet a trade of international proportions in the first half of the thirteenth. At the same time, it cannot later have grown as it did without having first developed from local to at least regional dimensions between, say, 1150 and 1250. If we are to argue, as Roxanna Brown has done,[56] that the later potters were not immigrants from China (or Dai Viet or Angkor) and that they displayed from

51 Cœdès, *Indianized States*, p. 180, and Georges Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, II (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1942), p. 176.

52 Wolters, 'Chên-li-fu', p. 19.

53 Cœdès, *Indianized States*, pp. 159-66.

54 But see Paul Bishop, Donald Hein, and David Godley, 'Was Medieval Sawankhalok like Modern Bangkok, Flooded Every Few Years but an Economic Powerhouse Nonetheless?' *Asian Perspectives*, 35, 2 (1996): 119-53.

55 Ram Khamhæng Inscription, face I, lines 18-19; see Griswold and Prasert, 'The Inscription of Rāma Gamheń of Sukhodaya (1292 A.D.)', *EHS*, pp. 241-90; it was first published in *JSS* 59, 2 (1971).

56 Roxanna M. Brown, *The Ceramics of South-east Asia: Their Dating and Identification*, 2nd edn (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 74-5.

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their earliest wares a distinctive local æsthetic, then they have to have been refining their craft for several decades before the end of the thirteenth century. Indeed, the earliest, unglazed wares so far discovered at Si Satcanalai date from as early as the mid-twelfth century.[57] And the most recent evidence seems to suggest that the pre-1300 ceramics industry was much better developed than was previously thought.[58]

In order to thrive on a large scale, a ceramics industry needs five things: good clay, a sophisticated knowledge of ceramics technology, an ample labour supply for both production and transport, a good fuel supply to fire the kilns, and good regional and international connections to organise and run sales and distribution. In addition, the industry required strong, effective and efficient local government.[59] We have to assume that the northern Central Plain had all of these, though the details can only be guessed.

The clay was provided by nature, and indeed it is still there, probably the alluvial deposit of the Yom River coming down from the mountains to the northwest (see Map 3 below.) At least some of the hundreds of kilns of Si Satcanalai have been excavated, and although many were very large and sophisticated in their design, capable of reaching and maintaining the high temperatures necessary for celadons and other fine wares, others – the earliest – share the common characteristic of being dug into the high banks of the Yom. Whatever other virtues these may have had in terms of ease of access and construction (kilns were later made of brick), they also would have been easy to supply with fuel from boats manoeuvring on the river. The fuel was wood from the hills and mountains which are never far away in the north Central Plain; and when the wood was burned, it supplied not only the heat that the ceramics required, but also the ash that was used in producing some of their brilliant, or subtle, glazes. The distinctive soft-green glaze of fine celadon, for example, is produced using the ashes of a certain tree, which are mixed with the silt from rice fields and water and applied to the clay pots before they are fired to 1,260° C in a low-oxygen atmosphere in the kiln.

The labour requirements of the ceramics industry probably were most heavy during the agricultural off-season, roughly from November or December through April. Men and women were needed not only to work as potters and as kiln-masters, but also to fetch and transport the fuel for the kilns, to prepare glaze, to dig up the necessary clay, to sort and pack the finished pots and perhaps even to transport the ceramics down the river to the sea where they could be transshipped for international commerce. We have no idea whether the international links were accomplished locally, or instead at some intermediate river-port or even all the way south at the sea. (We also will remember that the boats that came north to collect ceramics probably were not empty, and may have carried not only salt and foodstuffs, but also such import goods as cloth from India. They might also have carried mangrove wood from the rapidly dwindling forests of the delta.) It is highly likely that the chief commercial agents for this trade increasingly were Chinese, who were just now beginning to enter strongly into the international trade of the entire region.[60]

Such human efforts could not have been attained or sustained without a major commitment on the part of those who led local societies. Here we refer not to foreign rulers, or lords from far-away places, but to the indigenous rulers who were accepted by ordinary farming folk (as most of

57 Ibid., p. 6.

58 Ibid., p. 7. Based on her reading of Brown, Jennifer Foley (personal communication) sees a strong connection between the growth of ceramics production and the rise of state power in Angkor in the ninth century.

59 The treatment of the ceramics industry that follows is based upon discussions with Roxanna Brown and M.R. Rujaya Abhakorn, as well as, among others, J. C. Shaw, *Introducing Thai Ceramics, Also Burmese and Khmer* (Chiang Mai: Duangphorn Kemasingki, 1987); Brown, *Ceramics*; B. Refuge, *Swankalok, de export-ceramiek van Siam* (Lochem: De Tijdstroom, 1976); and promotional materials from Mengrai Kilns in Chiang Mai.

60 See Paul Wheatley, *The Golden Khersonese* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1961), especially pp. 61-4.

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**Map 2.** Mainland Southeast Asia c. 1200

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them would have been) as worthy of their respect and obedience. Here there was a natural tension between distant and local authorities. From the perspective of far-away Angkor, which had been trying intermittently to rule northern Siam since at least the eleventh century, the area already was to be valued for its agricultural production and for its manpower. That these people by the early thirteenth century might also be valuable for their production of ceramics (as well as for their apparent talent with silk, which according to a late-thirteenth-century visitor far exceeded Angkorean skills[61]) made the control of this region highly desirable, all the more so as the region's economic development increased its restiveness, as shown by the example of Chên-li-fu.

At the same time, however, the area was difficult to control. It was far from the centre, and could not be held in check by officials posted to Phitsanulok or Sukhothai from Angkor, or even from Lopburi.[62] Such officials, after all, would be in a distant and culturally alien area, dealing with local villagers tempted by the proximity of the mountains to escape. And there was much to escape as the rulers tried to maximise the economic efficiency of their agricultural, household and industrial production.

Angkor was anxious to hold the frontiers against the increasingly powerful and ambitious peoples of the northern mountain valleys. It is probably in these terms that we should see the small cities of Si Satcanalai, Sukhothai and Phitsanulok (as well as other nearby towns like Kamphængphet, which probably shared much the same *raison d'être*). They were garrison towns, as much military outposts as they were centres of export production of ceramics and silk. The difficulties in ruling these volatile areas, and an essential cultural difference between the brahmanised Angkorean elite and the upcountry, even backwoods, people of the frontier, seem to have caused Angkor to rely on local men as its agents in dealing with these populations. Earlier agents might have been the descendants of families long established in the area; but as the economy began to boom in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and as the manpower requirements of warfare, agriculture, ceramics production, and silk-weaving rapidly increased around 1200, increasing numbers of people began to migrate southwards into the region from the upland *müang* of the various peoples around the headwaters of the Caophraya River system and the Mekong valley beyond.

Moreover, the mood of the region now seemed dangerously to be shifting away from Angkor and similar theocentric polities. This already was taking the form of religious change, exemplified as early as the Dhānyapura Inscription of the 1160s, and soon it was to erupt in the heartland of Angkor's satrapies in upper Siam.

### Wat Bang Sanuk Inscription of 1219

For more than a century, it has been said that the earliest writing in Thai comes from the inscription of King Ram Khamhæng of Sukhothai, dated in AD 1292; and thus scholars have relied upon that inscription in their attempts to describe Siamese society at the end of the thirteenth century. (We leave aside the attempts of some scholars to argue that it is in fact a forgery from the nineteenth century, for reasons that will become apparent below.[63])

Hans Penth's radical re-reading of another inscription, previously called 'The Second-Oldest Writing in Siamese' and dated by modern editors to AD 1339, convincingly demonstrates that the oldest writing in Siamese in fact is that very inscription – from Wat Bang Sanuk in Phræ province, only about 60 miles (100 km) up the Yom River from Sukhothai.[64] While Sukhothai is down on the

61 Paul Pelliot, *Mémoires sur les coutumes du Cambodge de Tcheou Ta-kouan* (Œuvres posthumes de Paul Pelliot, III; Paris, 1951), p. 14; Chou Ta-kuan, *Notes on the Customs of Cambodia*, translated from Pelliot's French version by J. Gilman d'Arcy Paul (Bangkok: Social Science Association Press, 1967), p. 37.

62 In writing this paragraph, I am reminded that the region in question was difficult to rule even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, probably for similar reasons.

63 *The Ram Khamhæng Controversy: Collected Papers*, ed. James R. Chamberlain (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1991).

64 Hans Penth, 'The Date of the Wat Bang Sanuk Inscription', *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Thai Studies; Theme VI, Chiang Mai 1296-1996: 700th Anniversary* (Chiang Mai, 1996), pp. 19-29. Penth's most recent writing on this inscription is 'The Date of the Wat Bang Sanuk Inscription', *JSS*, 84, 2 (1996): 5-16.

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plains, Bang Sanuk is snugly nestled among the hills of the narrow Yom River valley along which travellers move from the Central Plain to Phræ and (over hills and a high plateau) to Lampang, neither of which is very far distant.[65]

Penth's main evidence for dating the Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription comes from the chronological information on the stone itself, which gives the date in the cyclical system of the old Northern Tai (shared with the Tai Yuan of Lan Na, the Lao, the Tai Khün and the Tai Lü). On the stone, the date is given in full form: 'on a *mœng plao* day, the ...teenth [?] day of the waxing moon of the seventh month, in a *kat mao* year, a Year of the Hare' (lines 20-21).[66]

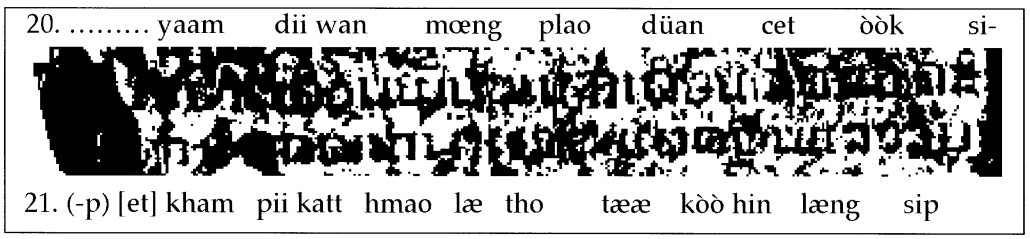


Plate 2 The Wat Bang Sanuk Inscription, lines 20-21, giving the date.

The first thing to note about this is that the number of the year is not given at all, but only the year's position in various chronological cycles. The 'Year of the Hare' is from a twelve-year cycle, which is common to much of mainland Southeast Asia in this form (as well as elsewhere in Asia using different names). The *kat mao* designation of the year says the same thing in another way, locating the year in two other cycles, both of which in this form are peculiar to Tai peoples – a 12-year cycle and a 10-year cycle which together repeat every 60 years.

The *kat mao* designation placed the year in the cycle to repeat in 1159, 1219, 1279, 1339, 1399, etc. To Griswold and Prasert, the year designation meant that the inscription had to be dated in AD 1339 or 1399, as they reasoned that it could not be dated before the Ram Khamhæng Inscription (1292) because that king claimed to have 'invented' the Thai alphabet in AD 1283.[67] It also could not have been dated later than 1399, they argued, because of its use of an orthographic peculiarity found only in early inscriptions, the forming of a medial short-A vowel by doubling the final consonant, rather than by writing a vowel (using the so-called *maihan-ākāt*) between the initial and final consonants. When they wrote, however, Griswold and Prasert did not have the means to check the rest of the dating information on the stone – the '*mœng plao* day, the ...teenth [?] day of the waxing moon of the seventh month'. The question mark on the '...teenth' day means that the day of the month was sometime between the 11th and 15th, part of the words on the left end of the line being unreadable. The key to dating the inscription was to find when the *mœng plao* day fell between the 11th and 15th days of the seventh month in a *kat mao* year. Until the recent path-breaking work of J. C. Eade, it was virtually impossible to make such calculations with any degree of certitude. Now, however, with the computer program of Eade and Gislén it is possible to demonstrate that the date has to be Thursday 28 March AD 1219, which was the eleventh day of the waxing moon of the seventh month

65 Indeed, this seems precisely to have been the route taken by Ernest Satow when travelling from Bangkok to Chiang Mai in 1885; see his account, *A Diplomat in Siam*, ed. Nigel Brailey (Gartmore, Scotland: Paul Strachan-Kiscadale, 1996). This passage is the route taken by the modern railway line.

66 The Wat Bang Sanuk Inscription is published in A. B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, 'The Second Oldest Writing in Siamese', *JSS*, 67, 1 (1979): 179-228; reprinted in *EHS*, pp. 768-72. It was published in Thai in *Cārük samai Sukhōthai* [Inscriptions from the Sukhothai Period] (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1983), pp. 21-5.

67 The Ram Khamhæng Inscription is most accessible in Griswold and Prasert, 'The Inscription of Rāma Gamheń'. The subject of the 'invention' of Thai writing is dealt with below.

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(Northern Tai style, which is two months 'ahead' of the Central Thai style), which was a *mœng plao* day in a *kat mao* year. No other date fits the criteria given.[68]

The very least of the contributions made to our knowledge by the revised date of the Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription is that it tells us that long before King Ram Khamhæng of Sukhothai, there were people in the upper Yom River valley who were using the distinctive Northern Tai calendar to both count and name their days and months, and to name their years.[69] This method of naming years is not attested epigraphically before the Ram Khamhæng and Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscriptions, but is often encountered later.[70]

The second important quality of the Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription has to do with its language and script. Griswold and Prasert have nothing to say about the language; but Hans Penth remarks that:

> The author, or so it seems, was not a very skilled writer because he sometimes omits key words such as a verb, a noun, a pronoun or name, or a connecting particle, which the reader has to supplement for himself, and which increases our difficulties with the text. But that may also be part of the author's style, or the style of time and place, because brevity is typical for old Lan Na texts. The letters appear written fluently enough and not at all clumsy.[71]

In general, the language seems simple, with little by way of flowery flourishes or even elaboration upon simple statements.

What of the alphabet in which these letters are written? Griswold and Prasert are in a good position to comment on this, as they have studied all the earliest Tai inscriptions:

> The Sukhodayan script is used throughout. The form of the letters is remarkably similar to that in Rama Gamheṅ's inscription; but the vowels have their normal position in relation to the consonants. The *maihan'akat* does not occur, being replaced by reduplicating the final consonant of the syllable. The vowels *ü* and *üü* are represented by *i* or *ii*. The *mai-ek* occurs only once, as a syllabic indicator, not as a tone marker; and the symbol for the *mai-tho* is lacking.[72]

In short, then, Griswold and Prasert posit a close relationship between the Wat Bāng Sanuk and Ram Khamhæng Inscriptions (although they assume a reverse chronological relationship between the two, with the latter preceding the former). It is worth remarking that nothing they say necessarily entails any exclusive chronological relationship between the two; that is, nothing makes it necessary that the Ram Khamhæng Inscription precedes the Wat Bāng Sanuk one. Similarly, there is nothing to suggest that either of these inscriptions could have been used to 'fake' the other. (The Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription was not discovered until the early 1940s; and if the Ram Khamhæng text had been used to 'fake' the Wat Bāng Sanuk one, surely the vowels would have been written in the same manner.)

The point here is that Tai writing already was in existence no later than the beginning of 1219. Perhaps the writer's lack of 'skill' in writing (noted by Penth above) might have been due to its being

68 See Eade, *The Calendrical Systems*. The core of his findings is encapsulated in the program by Gislén. Penth, 'Date', explores the various possibilities exhaustively.

69 Maha Cham Thongkhamwan, when editing inscription #78 (*Prachum silā cārük*, III, pp. 228-35) notes that even a 1392 inscription of Sukhothai carefully distinguishes the Khmer form of naming days Monday, Tuesday, … from the Tai form of naming them by the two cycles; and that they distinguish the '*Khòm*' (Khmer) form of naming years (e.g., 'Tiger') from the Tai way of counting them in the same cycle as they counted days. Interestingly, the inscription specifies both.

70 It also is an important feature of early chronicles. See David K. Wyatt, 'The Chronology of Nan History, A.D. 1320-1598', *JSS*, 64, 2 (July 1976): 202-6; and David K. Wyatt, *The Nan Chronicle* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1994), p. 13.

71 Penth, 'Date', p. 20.

72 Griswold and Prasert, 'Second Oldest Writing', *EHS*, p. 768.

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a relatively new skill. The writing is perhaps most clearly seen in the content of the inscription itself, which is firmly and fervently Buddhist. The text of the inscription is brief, and we might first examine it in full, before examining its components in detail. In the translation by Griswold and Prasert,[73] it begins with a three-line invocation in Pali:

> *[1-3.] Vandetamanujaṁ sa … mahantaṁ rattanattayaṁ pavakkhāmi mahādānam sunātha sādhavo.*[74]

This is then repeated in the Thai, which continues as follows:

> [4-8.] I raise my hands to salute the Three Gems, which are more excellent than Indra and B[rahma] … all the people. [You who are of noble rank] (such as) *Khun* or *Mun Nay*, (as well as) the populace, (should) all listen to the Lord Buddha's[75] teaching about earning merit.
>
> [8-13.] (We) shall speak about Khun … the ruler of Müang Tròk Salòp and Chæ Ngun, who has diffused the love of earning merit and (observing the) Dharma. He is a kindly ruler who persuaded nobles, officials, *mun nay* and the populace, as well as many princesses and princes, to stamp images of the Lord (Buddha) in tin or clay,[76] totaling eleven thousand one hundred and eight.
>
> [13-21.] (He presented this monastery with) one holy relic, two … two ivory images (of the Buddha), as well as silver trays for areca nuts and gold trays for areca nuts, umbrellas and flags, accompanied by the sound of xylophones and the sound of drums, (and other things, such as) bowls of parched rice, flowers, torches, candles, incense, sandalwood and fragrant oil. He bowed down to do homage with the five points,[77] making these offerings in homage to the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. Then he put ... in a basin ... at an auspicious moment on a *mœng plao* day, the …teenth [?] day of the waxing moon of the seventh month, in a *kat mao* year, a Year of the Hare.
>
> [21-29.] From the time they started forming laterite (into blocks to build a *cetiya*?) up to the time they covered it with stucco, it took one month. Then he also erected a *sala* and prepared offerings to give as alms (to the monks). ... (He gave) one family of slaves to look after the holy (*cetiya*?), [one] elephant, [one horse,] one ox, and one buffalo … monastic robes for Cao Bay Salòp eight hundred and sixty thousand (cowries?) fifty pillows … areca nuts....

The Buddhism of the inscription does not seem to be a long-established religion, but rather one that is relatively recent. Notice that the first thing said about the Buddhism (of the 'Triple Gems', Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha) is that it is 'more excellent than Indra and Brahma' (line 5).[78] Is it possible that the whole inscription is a counter-argument to those who are adherents of the Indic brahmanical religion that for centuries had been present in this region and was associated particularly with the Angkorean empire? The same is suggested by the assertion that the people 'should all listen to the Lord Buddha', implying that there were alternative voices to whom they could have listened.

73 Ibid., p. 772.

74 The Pali does not appear in Penth's article, nor is it translated in that of Griswold and Prasert, who simply say that 'the text itself begins with a passage of homage to the Three Gems in Pali, followed by one in Tai' (p. 769). I have supplied it from the text edited by Prasan Bunprakhong in *Cārūk samai Sukhōthai*, p. 24. Oskar von Hinüber has been very helpful in explicating the Pali (personal communication, 31 May 1997), which seems to be simply an invocation to the Triple Gems.

75 'The reading is doubtful and our translation conjectural' (Griswold and Prasert, henceforth 'G&P').

76 'That is, to make votive tablets' (G&P).

77 'That is, with his forehead, both his hands, and both his knees on the ground' (G&P).

78 I am reminded of the stele found with the 1168 Dong Mæ Nang Müang (Dhānyapura) Inscription, which is said to have been 'a stele representing the Buddha seated descending from the Thirty-third Heaven between Indra and Brahma' (Cœdès, 'Nouvelles données épigraphiques', p. 132). There may be an important point to this - the emphasis being not on conflict with 'Hindu' religious forms but rather on the complementarity of Buddhism to them.

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It is also interesting to note the inscription's emphasis upon a simple, central idea of Buddhism, the idea of 'merit'. That concept is simply and phonetically spelled here, as *bun* rather than in its later Pali-Sanskrit spelling as *puña* (which still was pronounced *bun*). This emphasis on 'merit' has two important implications: the first, that individuals might already have greater or lesser amounts of 'merit', including kings who had as much as proven so by their worldly status; and the second, that individuals and societies might improve their status and prospects by making merit here and now. We will have occasion to return to these points later.

The inscription seems to be implying that all this religious fervor is to be attributed to the leadership of the local ruler of Müang Tròk Salòp and Chæ Ngun who persuaded the common people and nobles alike to participate in merit-making on the day that was traditionally the greatest such ceremonial day of the year, the day immediately following the day that began the solar New Year (called *songkrān*, which was on Wednesday 27 March 1219).[79] This official is designated '*khun*', a Tai title. A *khun* nowadays is thought of as a very low-ranking official; but in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries he was of very high rank, and could even be the ruler of an independent principality. In the inscription of Ram Khamhæng, for example, that king sometimes is referred to as 'the *khun*'. Neither that inscription nor this one makes reference to this ruler having any superior.

But what were the 'Müang Tròk Salòp and Chæ Ngun' over which he ruled? The first is a very curious combination of Tai and Austroasiatic (i.e. Mōn-Khmer) words. '*Müang*' is well known as a unit of Tai social and political organisation, and it was often prefixed to proper names to make them of a specific higher status, i.e., higher than a village. 'Tròk Salòp' consists of two words, both of which appear to be Khmer (or Mōn?).[80]

The latter place, Chæ Ngun, on the other hand, is a toponym in Northern Thai. The '*chæ*' refers to a fortified *müang*, and is comparable to the many places denominated *chiang*. For example, there are eight places with names beginning with *chæ* in the Chiang Mai Chronicle.[81] *Ngun* seems to be a reference to a particular kind of tree used in medicines.[82] Is the reference here to a single town, or to two towns joined in a single polity?

One way of reading the combined toponyms might be to regard them as concatenating the old and new names for a single place. A later example of this type of concatenation would be the name for Bangkok, which perpetuated the names of two of its predecessors, Dvāravatī and Ayudhyā. If it were to be this way, then Tròk Salòp would have been re-named Chæ Ngun. This is possible, but what is more likely is suggested by the Sukhothai – Si Satcanalai combination, which occurs so often in the Ram Khamhæng Inscription. There were many early examples of such double-toponyms,[83] which seem to have represented some pairing of cities, perhaps some primitive form of state-building which begins by combining two city-states and then develops further to combine many localities under a single capital.

Probably the most difficult question we might address to the Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription (and its reading) is whether it is credible as a source from 1219. Here, the technical questions (language,

79 This calculation was derived through the Gislén computer program.

80 I have checked Khmer and Mon dictionaries without success, nor have consultations with Gerard Diffloth and Graham Thurgood shed light on these terms.

81 On *chæ*, see David Wyatt and Aroonrut Wichienkeeo, *The Chiang Mai Chronicle* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1996), p. 31, fn. 2, and references to various "Chæ" toponyms in the index.

82 For example, see Aroonrut Wichienkeeo et al., *The Northern Thai Dictionary of Palm-Leaf Manuscipts* (Chiang Mai: Suriwong, 1996), p.222 (*chæ*) and p. 155 [two meanings for the word *ngun*, meaning either 'a kind of tree in the Datisca family ([*Tetrameles nudiflora*])' or 'agar-agar, jelly'.] This new dictionary is preferable to others because it lists exclusively words attested from old palm-leaf manuscripts. (There are numerous other words that should be added.)

83 Cf. Jean Rispaud, 'Les noms à éléments numéraux des principautés Taï', *JSS*, 29, 2 (1937): 77-122.

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script, chronology, etc.) are best left to experts (though on such questions Hans Penth speaks with considerable authority). But what of the content and context of the stone? Do these make sense for 1219, or must they be associated with a later period? The Dhānyapura Inscription, though in Khmer rather than in Thai, is a persuasive argument in favour of continuity in the religious context, and of discontinuity in the political and social context.

But first let us dispose of a more straightforward question, having to do with the script in which the inscription is written.

### The 'invention' of Siamese writing

If we were to re-date the Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription to 1219 and put it thereby seventy-three years before the Ram Khamhæng Inscription, or sixty-four years before Ram Khamhæng supposedly 'invented' the writing system shared by the two, we either create an anachronism, or else we contradict the statement of the Ram Khamhæng Inscription that 'formerly these Tai letters did not exist. In 1205 śaka, a Year of the Goat [AD 1283], King Ram Khamhæng set his mind and his heart on devising these Tai letters. So these Tai letters exist because that lord devised them.'[84]

We might begin, therefore, by simply noting what the 1292 inscription does and does not say. When it says that 'formerly these Tai letters did not exist', it cannot be saying that none of the individual letters of the alphabet used in it existed before, for there are attested examples of many of them in incontrovertably earlier epigraphy, even excepting Wat Bāng Sanuk.[85] Penth, in an article published well before he re-dated the latter, persuasively argued that Tai languages probably were written in a variety of alphabets – South Indian, Grantha, Mōn, and Khmer – for as long as two centuries before the Ram Khamhæng Inscription.[86] What the king did in 1283, then, had to do with one particular form of Thai writing, not with Tai writing in general. Note that the phrase 'Tai letters' occurs three times in the passage quoted, and all three times it occurs accompanied by the definite article 'these'. The inscription does not say 'Tai letters' with no qualifying article, which would make the phrase exclusive, that is, including all Tai letters. No, instead the stone reads 'these Tai letters', implying that there could be other 'Tai letters' which the king did not 'devise'[87]. (That is, we cannot use the Wat Bāng Sanuk text to prove that the Ram Khamhæng Inscription is a forgery.)

What, then, did Ram Khamhæng devise or invent? The obvious answer is the particular form of letters used on the inscription with which many credit him, the stone supposedly from AD 1292. There is apparently only one other stone which is written in a similar script, and that is the Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription. Ram Khamhæng could not have 'invented' the particular form of writing used in the Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription if that stone is dated in 1219. Therefore we are left to ask: What is distinctive about the Ram Khamhæng Inscription that distinguishes it even from the Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription? The answer is simple: the Ram Khamhæng Inscription writes vowels on the line like the consonants, rather than above or below the line as superscripts or subscripts as in other inscriptions, and it has no tone-marks.

One way of making this point is to compare the two inscriptions' rendering of identical words. Take, for example, the words *luuk cao luuk khun* and *phrai thai* which occur in both inscriptions.

The *u* vowel of *luuk* is written below the line in the Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription and on the line, preceding the consonant, in the Ram Khamhæng Inscription, but otherwise the orthographies of the two texts are very similar; note especially the rendering of the *c* consonant of *cao*.

84 Face IV, lines 8-11, in the translation by Griswold and Prasert.
85 Perhaps it is useful to recall here that most scholars have kept open the possibility that most or all of the fourth face of the Ram Khamhæng Inscription might be a postscript added to the original inscription some indeterminate number of years afterwards.
86 Hans Penth, 'Thai Literacy', *Bulletin of the Archive of Lan Na Inscriptions*, 4 (1992): 19-112.
87 The same argument appears in Cœdès, *Indianized States*, p. 197.

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A minimal interpretation of the Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription would be that it provides the precursor of the writing system employed on the Ram Khamhæng Inscription, the 'Tai letters' that the king is said to have modified in 1283 and used in 1292. There is, however, a broader way of using Wat Bāng Sanuk as an example of the more general point that, as Penth argues, various Tai groups were employing elements of contemporary writing systems to write their own language well before 1283.

### A question of chronometrics

Reference was made above to the designation of years and days in the Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription according to a 60-unit cycle. It is worth dwelling on that subject, because it reveals some hidden complexities on the stone. The cyclical system in use here was common in the northern region until recent times. It consists of a cycle of 12 paired with items from a cycle of 10, with both years and days named by the same terminology. Eade provides a succinct explanation of the system:

> This system uses a set of ten words in combination with a set of twelve words, to produce a 60-year cycle. Ten times twelve is 120, but the cycle is only 60 in extent because only even-with-even and odd-with-odd combinations are allowed. … The decimal series … is: *kap, dap, rwai, mœng, pœk, kat, kot, ruang, tao, ka*…The duodecimal series is: *cai, pao, yi, mao, si, sai, sanga, met, san, rao, set, kai.*[88]

He then gives a table of the 60 permissible combinations, running from *kap cai* to *ka kai.*

When early sources give a date using cyclical names for years, they sometimes give both the usual modern Thai forms (*raka, chalu*, etc.), which will be identified as being in '*Khòm*' (that is, Khmer) style, and then the northern cyclical form (*kap cai* etc.), said to be in 'T(h)ai' style.[89] The significance of the Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription, where the northern cyclical designation is used for only the year and not the day, is that this particular cyclical form is unique to Tai-language inscriptions. It is used in at least nine of the inscriptions from the earliest period, as indexed by Yoneo Ishii and others.[90] There seems to be no consistent pattern in how the system is used, although in all cases it is specifically identified as 'T(h)ai', usually in explicit contradistinction to '*Khòm*'. Sometimes it is applied only to years, sometimes only to days, and sometimes to both. As examples, it is applied only to days (*hon thai*) in Inscriptions numbered 3 (Nakhòn Chum), 5 (Mango Grove #1) and 102 (Gold Plate). This last, for example, gives a date as a *Khòm* Wednesday, a Thai *pœk san* day. As examples of the second sort, applying the northern cycle to years only, we may take Inscriptions 7 (Mango Grove #2), 10 (of CS 766 [1404]), 38 (Law on Theft, 1397), 63 (Phræ, 1456), and 94 (Gold Plate, CS 746). Inscription 45 (Pact between Sukhothai and Nan) uses it for both year and day in CS 764 (AD 1402).[91]

Let us look again at how the cyclical designations appear in the Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription: 'at an auspicious moment on a *mœng plao* day, the …teenth [?] day of the waxing moon of the seventh month, in a *kat mao* year, a Year of the Hare'. There is no explicit 'ethnicising' of the cycles, though

88 Eade, *Calendrical Systems*, p. 24. See also Roger Billard, 'Les cycles chronographiques chinois dans les inscriptions thaïes', *BEFEO*, 51 (1963): 403-31.

89 See below for examples.

90 Yoneo Ishii et al., *A Glossarial Index of the Sukhothai Inscriptions* (Bangkok: Amarin, 1989).

91 The details are as follows (following the original numbering by Cœdès):
#3, face 1, lines 1, 31: used only for weekday; called *hon Thai*, 'by Thai time'.
#5, face 3, line 23: used only for weekday; called *hon Thai.*
#7, face 4, lines 11, 17: used only for year; *chalu* year, *ruang pao* year by *hon Thai*; and *thò* year, *kat mao* year by *hon Thai.*
#10, face 1, line 3: used only for year; *wòk* year; *hon thai kap san.*
#38, face 1, line 1: used for year; *chalu* year; *luang mao* by *hon thai.*
#45, face 1, lines 28, 30: for year, *Khòm* year *wòk*, Thai year *tao san*: and for day, *Khòm* Thursday, Thai day *tao met.*
#63, line 2: *chuat* year, which the Thai call a *cai* year.
#94, line 1: only day, Friday, a Thai *kap san* [day].
#102, face 1, line 30: only for day, on a *Khòm* Wednesday, a Thai *pœk san* day.

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both versions are present for the year (but not for the day): the 'Year of the Hare' is only implicitly a 'Khmer' designation. At least in this inscription the T(h)ai cycle is given primacy by being mentioned first; and, most interestingly, the day of the week is given only in northern reckoning, identified here as neither 'Mōn' nor '*Khòm* [Khmer]'.

What does this mean? The contemporary choices would seem to have been limited. Both Haripuñjaya and Angkor appear to have been using seven-day weekday names based on the Indo-European model (Sun-day, Moon-day, etc.), while the Yonok people (and their neighbours to the north) were using a 60-cycle for both their days and their years. Thus the 'chronometrics' of the Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription would seem to provide a good indication of the cultural affiliation of Tròk Salòp-Chæ Ngun with people in the direction of Yonok, rather than those to the east or south.

This particular conclusion is complicated by J. Marvin Brown's work on the origins of the Sukhothai writing system. In an article first published in the 1960s, and written under the impression that the Ram Khamhæng Inscription was the oldest specimen of Thai writing, Brown argues that it has to have been written by people speaking a particular dialect of Tai that had only three tones, rather than one having six or seven, which means a dialect originating in the direction of Siang Khwang in present-day Laos.[92] The handling of tones, however, is different – basically, tones are ignored in the Ram Khamhæng text – and the handling of vowels is different in the two inscriptions as well. Therefore, it is difficult to reach any conclusions about the language of the inscribers at Wat Bāng Sanuk based on the linguistic qualities of the inscription, at least at this point.

### Social complexity in northern Siam

Today it is hard to imagine that the neighbourhood of Wat Bāng Sanuk, in the Wang Chin subdistrict in the extreme south of Phræ province, could have supported a dense population. It lies towards the southern end of a long (60 miles/100 km) valley that stretches to north of Phræ. Immediately to its southeast, the Yom River rushes into a narrow defile through the mountains, which opens on a small valley (roughly 10 by 15 miles in size), then through another pass through the mountains which leads to Si Satcanalai and Sukhothai at the northern fringe of the Central Plain. Thus, the Wat Bāng Sanuk area (Müang Tròk Salòp/Chæ Ngun) was well insulated from the presumably more complex society of the Central Plain – which at the end of the reign of King Jayavarman VII meant the Angkorean empire. This is not to say that the society of Tròk Salòp/Chæ Ngun was not complex, however. The inscription implies that there were at least six distinct groups in local society: the ruler (and his relatives), and 'nobles, officials, *mun nay* and the populace', as well as slaves. Each of these requires some comment.[93]

What Griswold and Prasert render as 'nobles' is written in the inscription as '*luk cao*' (line 10), literally, 'children of the ruler'. Because 'princes and princesses' are listed separately (below), Griswold's and Prasert's translation of *luk cao* as 'nobles' suggests that something less than a blood relationship to the ruler is indicated. Their 'kinship' to the 'kingship' might be regarded as more fictive than real, and have as its primary meaning that this group of 'nobles' was born to high rank, and shared in the prerogatives and privileges of the ruler. This was a class, like the *cao* of Chiang Mai and Lan Na, who enjoyed supremacy and lorded it over the rest of society, under the primacy of the ruler, and may have shared a similar descent from a common ruling class.

The 'officials' of the translation reflects '*luk khun*' (line 11) in the text. In later times this might be rendered as 'judges', as the *luk khun na sala* were the high officials convened as a group to adjudicate legal matters. The difference between the *luk cao* and the *luk khun* is that, while the first were the

92 J. Marvin Brown, *From Ancient Thai to Modern Dialects* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1985), pp. 1-4.

93 References throughout to the Thai version are to the text as found in *Cārük samai Sukhōthai*, pp. 24-5.

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ruler's 'children' by virtue of having been born to high status, the second were his figurative 'children' by virtue of his office. We seem to have here the germ of social differentiation, which in Ayudhya and Bangkok was the difference between 'royals' and 'nobles'. Both represented a status into which one was born, but the higher royal group (*luk cao*) was exclusively composed of those descended from the *cao*.

Griswold and Prasert did not even attempt a translation of the next group, the *mun nai* (line 11, spelled *mun nay* in their transliteration). These were most definitely commoners, men who were the immediate leaders (*nai*) or 'foremen' of conscripted labour, mobilised for warfare or public works. According to Ishii *et al.*, the term appears in only one other inscription, the Ayudhya law, which Griswold and Prasert date to 1399.[94] While Ishii *et al.* define the term as 'group-chiefs' and maybe as 'the chief of territory', Griswold and Prasert refer to them as 'territorial chiefs', which has much the same meaning. In old Northern Thai law (known as the *Mangraisat* or 'Code of Mangrai'), the relevant point of contact is the word '*nai*', which was used for the leaders of decimally defined groups of the population for (presumably) war and labour – *nai sip*, *nai ha-sip*, and *nai ròi* were in charge of 10, 50 and 100 men respectively.[95] If *mun* (Pali *mula*) bears the meaning 'fundamental, basic, general', then the compound *mun nai* might have the effect of applying to all the grades of *nai*. Note that the chiefs of 1,000 and of 10,000 in the *Mangraisat* tradition are denominated *cao*, which has royal implications. These *mun nai* must then be seen as intermediate between ordinary commoners (but not including slaves) and officials and royalty.

Next, there is what Griswold and Prasert refer to as the 'populace'. The term used for them, '*phrai thai*' (line 11) is well-known and commented upon in a variety of sources; and the compound of the two Tai words seems to imply both freedom and bondage – that is, liability for labour service in otherwise unbonded lives. These might also be termed commoners, inhabiting the villages that surrounded Müang Tròk Salòp and Chæ Ngun – perhaps the southern part of the Upper Yom Valley.

We might note here the mention of slaves only as people who were presented to the Religion. They are not included in the social groups mentioned among those who participated in stamping votive tablets or, by extension, joined in the public celebration of the Religion. Curiously, the word which Griswold and Prasert translate as 'slaves' – *khon khròk* – is not the usual term used for slaves, nor do they comment on their translation. The word does, however, appear in dictionaries ranging from Pallegoix (1854) and McFarland (1944) to the latest Royal Academy dictionary (1982; s.v. *khròk*), all with a definition like McFarland's: 'a brood; a litter; slaves'. We might suspect that the word originates with the enslavement of people, presumably of Austroasiatic stock, that the early Tai regarded as crude 'primitives'.[96]

Finally, we come back to the top of the society, to what Griswold and Prasert refer to as 'many princesses and princes' (line 11). This reference underlines the separation of the royalty from even the 'nobles'. The Thai phrase used here is *chao mæ chao cao*. The word *chao* used here usually indicates people who 'reside' in a particular status. The 'status' involved seems to be bifurcated by gender, a class of 'mothers' (*mæ*) and a class of 'lords' (*cao*). The implication is unequivocally a definition by blood or descent, indicating a hereditary class within which, it should be noted, descent passes on both the male and the female sides.

94 Ishii *et al.*, *Glossarial Index*, p. 158; and Griswold and Prasert, *EHS*, p. 113.

95 See David Wyatt, 'Laws and Social Order in Early Thailand: An Introduction to the *Mangraisat*', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 15, 2 (Sept. 1984): 245-52, reprinted in David Wyatt, *Studies in Thai History* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1994), pp. 70-81; see especially pp. 79-81.

96 J. B. Pallegoix, *Dictionarium linguæ Thaï sive siamensis* (Paris: Jussu Imperatorie Impressum, 1854; repr. Farnborough, Hants: Gregg International, 1972), p. 314; George Bradley McFarland, *Thai–English Dictionary* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1944), p. 178; *Photcananukrom chabap Rātchabandittayasatān Ph.S. 2525* (Bangkok: Royal Academy, 1982), p. 165.

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This is, therefore, a relatively simple society, but it is a society in which there are important distinctions between rulers and ruled; hierarchy is based on various degrees of power that each group had over others, and the sources of power that different groups enjoyed. This social system allowed for high status to be obtained either by birth (*luk cao*) or by achievement (*luk khun, mun nai*). On the whole, however, birth was more important than achievement, and the latter existed only when confirmed by 'born' officers. There are, it might be noted, no distinctions based on ethnicity or religion – between Tai and Mōn or Khmer, between urban and rural people, between warriors and human ruminants, and so on. It is a society in which peoples' status might change, at least in the case of non-royal members.

### Piety and social hierarchy

The text observes of the king that 'he is a kindly ruler who persuaded nobles, officials, mun nay and the populace, as well as many princesses and princes, to stamp images of the Lord (Buddha) in tin or clay, totalling eleven thousand one hundred and eight'. The separation of the various elements of the population in the first part of this sentence increases the force of the latter part, where these same groups combine together to make votive tablets.[97] The occasion for this outpouring of devotion and for the coalescence of the community in a common endeavour, and the central point of the entire inscription, is the enshrinement on 28 March 1219 of a Buddha relic. The passages describing this occasion say much about life in this region in the early thirteenth century.

A month earlier, presumably around the middle of the sixth (Siamese fourth) month, the word (command? persuasion? strong suggestion?) had gone out from the ruler that all the *phrai thai* should be mobilised to build a large *cetiya*. To do this, they dug a large pit into the earthen banks near the river, to obtain the iron-rich clayey soil known as laterite, which has the unique property of turning as hard as rock when exposed to air. It was probably cut into blocks using metal or sharpened-bamboo knives and allowed to dry semi-hard before being moved (on carts pulled by draft animals?) to the temple grounds, where the blocks were piled into the vertical structure of the *cetiya*.[98] After the blocks were fully dry and hard they were covered with a whitish stucco, which was shaped into ornamentation while still wet and then perhaps coloured.

February was in the middle of the long dry season, when little or no rain would have fallen for three months, and it would be two or three months before the rains of a new agricultural season began. This would have been a time for jollity, a time of fairs and festivities. Griswold and Prasert mention 'the sound of xylophones and the sound of drums' while Penth translates the same sentence as 'the sounds of music and drums'. The mention of 'umbrellas and flags' may be significant to the extent that the same sounds and sights feature in present-day religious festivities, especially in Northern Thailand. The strong Northern Tai flavour of the time-reckoning at the close of this paragraph reinforces the image of a particular kind of community and culture.

As for the gifts presented on this occasion, the predominant impression is one of great prosperity – ivory, gold, silver, music, flowers, puffed rice, candles, torches, incense, sandalwood, fragrant oil. The bestowing of such offerings upon the Religion implies both some prosperity and considerable public esteem (or access to the fruits of the labour of the common people) on the part

97 Why are there 'eleven thousand one hundred and eight' of these tablets (line 13)? One hundred and eight is a popular and widespread number which we frequently encounter in Buddhist contexts; it is the product of one to the first power, times two to the second power, and times three to the third power (1 x 4 x 27). Were perhaps a hundred times more votive tablets required in order to be able to distribute them to all the newly fervent believers who had participated in their creation? Might we have here a rough pointer to population numbers?

98 Probably the best example of the technology of laterite can be seen in the ruins of the old city at Kamphængphet, where there are truly monumental, enormous laterite pillars as well as the pit from which the laterite was dug. See Mali Khoksanthia and Phitthaya Damdenngam, *Nam chom bōrānwatthusathān müang Kamphængphēt* (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1970), esp. p. 36.

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of the donors. These impressions are further reinforced by the gifts mentioned in the next paragraph as (presumably) coming from the ruler – a *sala* (a hall of public assembly), one family of slaves and one each of a number of kinds of animals.

The last part of the (surviving) inscription, after mention of the building of the laterite-stucco *cetiya*, makes glancing reference to the figure who seems to have been the focal point of much of the religiosity, one Cao Phai Salòp.[99] He must have been a Buddhist monk, as he was given monastic robes. We would ordinarily suppose that the 'fifty pillows' mentioned as having been given this day were for the monks, implying a very large religious community; but it may be that high-ranking laypersons also were allowed to enjoy such luxuries in the temple.

The act of enshrining a (Buddha) relic is more significant than at first appears. It certainly testifies to the piety and aspirations of the community at a time of great religious fervour and conversion. It also says something about the *khun* (king) who performed the ceremony. Common religious belief held that relics were extremely powerful objects, and therefore potentially very dangerous. Only a ruler endowed with considerable personal merit, and thus imbued with enormous sacral power, could dare to touch, let alone move, a relic. The implicit acceptance of this belief by the community (shown by their participation in this ceremonial occasion) demonstrates their acceptance to a considerable degree of this conception of the ruler.

One of the most famous examples of a ruler demonstrating his power by handling a relic of the Buddha is that given on the final face (which may be a postscript) of the Ram Khamhæng Inscription:

> In 1207 *śaka*, a Year of the Boar [AD 1285], he caused the holy relics to be dug up so that everyone could see them. They were worshipped for a month and six days, then they were buried in the middle of Sri Sajjanalai, and a *cetiya* was built on top of them which was finished in six years. A wall of rock enclosing the Phra Dhatu [reliquary] was built which was finished in three years.[100]

The passage is remarkably similar to that of the Wat Bang Sanuk Inscription, except that the architectural works were completed much more slowly. (The 'wall of rock enclosing the Phra Dhatu' was probably made of laterite.) A similar episode also is given for the enshrining of the relics at Wat Phu Phiang Chæ Hæng at Nan in 1356.[101]

What is going on here? This is a peculiar and widespread form of what we might call the 'localisation' of Buddhism. For local believers (and would-be believers) in ancient Siam, Buddhism was a particular and attractive religious form that was based on the real life, works and teachings of an individual who lived many centuries ago in a place far away that they might have referred to as India, or as the Jambu Continent, but certainly nowhere close by. Their attraction to, and belief in, the Buddha and his teachings were made more 'real' by creating a local physical presence of the Buddha. This was done in a number of ways: by planting sprigs from the tree under which the Buddha had attained Enlightenment, by discovering indentations in nearby rocks that came to be thought of as 'footprints' which he had made eons earlier; by attributing to him prophecies that specifically foretold events peculiar to specific localities; and by possessing and venerating physical relics of his body.[102]

99 Note that '*cao*' prefixes his name/title. Does this mean that he was royal, or descended from kings? Probably not: the thirteenth-century practice seems to have been for monks, or high-ranking monks, to be called *cao ku* or *cao*; see Chou, *Notes on the Customs of Cambodia*, p. 24.

100 Face IV, lines 4-8; translation from Griswold and Prasert, 'The Inscription of Rama Gamhaeng'.

101 Wyatt, *Nan Chronicle*, pp. 46-7.

102 There are numerous references to all of these phenomena in the local historical and semi-historical literature. For examples, see Wyatt and Aroonrut, *The Chiang Mai Chronicle*.

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For specific examples of relics, we might look to virtually any of the standard historical works of Buddhism, which would have been known to local believers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Siam. See, for example, the Great Chronicle of Buddhism and of Sri Lanka, the *Mahāvamsa* of Mahānāma. The bodily relics are present, and venerated, almost from the beginning of that text.[103] However, relics did not become a central feature of the Religion until Buddhism had reached Sri Lanka, in which connection the *Mahāvamsa* devotes a full chapter to 'The Arrival of the Relics'. They appear because, according to the chronicle, Buddhist monks complained to the king that 'Long is the time … since we have seen the Sambuddha. We lived a life without a master. There is nothing here for us to worship.'[104] They are more exhaustively discussed in the *Thūpavamsa*, a text composed in twelfth-century Sri Lanka, based on earlier versions in Pali and Sinhalese.[105] Given especially the date of composition of this text, it might be reasonable to suppose that it represents the teachings that might be expected to have been transmitted to Siam and neighbouring areas at the same time.

According to the *Thūpavamsa*, as he was about to be cremated, the Buddha himself:

> resolved on the scattering of his relics, thus: 'I am to live not for long, but to pass away entirely, and my teaching has not yet been spread everywhere; so when I pass away entirely, let the multitude take my relics, even of the size of a mustard seed, and make a shrine each in his own dwelling place, and worshipping them, let them aim at [the attainment of] heaven.'[106]

Those relics, eventually numbering as many as 84,000, were fought over by rival rulers and by believers and non-believers alike; but ultimately the Emperor Aśoka reunited them and enshrined them in 84,000 topes, or shrines, throughout his dominions.[107]

The idea that relics could be handled only by virtuous and meritful rulers is only intermittently and incompletely developed in the earlier canonical sources, and indeed there are numerous instances of unbelievers or evil persons obtaining possession of them, if only briefly. Similarly, the earlier sources do not seem to ascribe supernatural powers to the relics. All this changes by the time relics begin to be discussed in the texts of Southeast Asia.

The *Jinakālamālī*, an early-sixteenth-century chronicle from Chiang Mai, summarises the traditional Pali account of the origin and early history of the Buddha's relics.[108] The last half of this text is concerned with the history of Buddhism in what is now Thailand, and Buddhism provides the connection between the two halves of the text. The text attributes the rise of states in this region to the prophecies of the Buddha and the discovery in the region of his relics, originally placed in a golden casket by the Emperor Aśoka. Those relics then were discovered by a King Ādicca (or Aditya) of Haripuñjaya (Lamphun) and enshrined in the Great Reliquary there.[109] The relics were revealed

103 *The Mahāvamsa or The Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, tr. Wilhelm Geiger and Mabel Bode (London, 1912; reprinted New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1993), 3.5, 3.11.

104 Ibid., p. 116 (17.2).

105 *The Legend of the Topes (Thūpavamsa)*, tr. and ed. B. C. Law (Calcutta, 1945; reprint New Delhi: Oriental Reprint, 1986), p. iii.

106 Ibid., 4.8 (p. 25). The same speech is translated by Ratanapañña, author of *Jinakālamālī*, as follows: 'I will thus pass away in perfect Nibbāna not having remained [on earth] for long; my Dispensation is not yet widely established everywhere; therefore, let the great multitude, when I have passed away in perfect Nibbāna, while paying homage to a relic of mine even of the size of a mustard seed by taking it and making a shrine of it in each one's dwelling place, have heaven as their goal'. (N. A. Jayawickrama, *The Sheaf of Garlands of the Epochs of the Conqueror, being a translation of Jinakālamālīpakaranam of Ratanapañña Thera of Thailand* [London: Pali Text Society/Luzac, 1968], p. 52.)

107 *Thūpavamsa*, 6.1-13 (Law edn, pp. 34-40).

108 Jayawickrama, *Sheaf of Garlands*, pp. 52-4, 66-8, 71-6, 79-81, 88-94.

109 Ibid., pp. 108-9.

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when they performed miracles at his command, such as hovering in the air three cubits above the ground and emitting coloured rays. After resisting movement, by magically sinking under the earth and 'refusing' to emerge, the relics finally 'yielded' to the king's pious supplication and prayers and were enshrined.[110] The real date of these events, though given by the source as equivalent to AD 1063, is thought by Cœdès to be in the late twelfth century.[111]

The *Jinakālamālī* cannot be taken literally, but it is interesting to note that the relic Ādicca enshrined was said to have been fashioned by King Aśoka. The Dhānyapura/Nakhòn Sawan Inscription (1168) also was associated with a king named Aśoka, and with a large cache of votive tablets. These circumstances, in turn, are reminiscent of the Tròk Salòp/Chæ Ngun (or Wat Bāng Sanuk) inscription of 1219 (which, however, includes no Aśoka reference).

The *Jinakālamālī* contains numerous subsequent references to relics and their powers. Relics regularly perform miracles, such as causing the earth to quake; they miraculously enter the heads of Buddha images, and they often are enshrined by kings, or occasionally by particularly powerful Buddhist monks.[112] Though they are often mentioned in the chronicles, however, there is never any explicit explanation of the moral principles that define them. We can, however, deduce these from the many references to them. Almost always it is kings, and invariably 'good' kings, to whom relics 'reveal themselves' by hovering above the ground or emitting wondrous lights. When others discover them, they are given to kings, or reported to kings for the latter to fetch and handle. In 1808, for example, when two novices discovered a ceramic urn containing relics, they immediately turned it over to a passing prince.[113] On another occasion, in AD 1474, a relic indicated its presence to a ruler of Nan by emitting brilliant rays; but when the ruler dug up a casket containing the relics, he summoned a passing holy ascetic to pry open the urn.[114] In short, then, relics appear to good, powerful kings; relics are sufficiently powerful that they are to be feared, for they are able even to cause earthquakes. Relics are worth troubling over, for their presence confers boons upon those who venerate them, and they connect those people with a religion wider in space and time. Relics are so powerful, however, that they cannot be treated lightly, and they must be handled by people who themselves have a considerable fund of positive moral power. If they are handled by unworthy people, particularly unworthy rulers, then all sorts of calamities could be visited upon the country.

Implicitly, then, the ruler of Tròk Salòp-Chæ Ngun is a highly meritful person himself. He appears to be completely independent of other political powers. The community over which he presides is rich and powerful; and the overall mood of the inscription exudes confidence and optimism. It would be tempting to contrast this religious view of a community's constitution with that presented in King Ram Khamhæng's inscription of less than 80 years later, for in that inscription some prominence is given to an animistic ingredient (Phra Khapung, who is superior to all the other spirits of the kingdom[115]) which is totally absent from the Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription. However, the comparison is not valid, because the latter emanates from a specifically Buddhist religious context, while the context of the Sukhothai inscription on the whole is secular.

Lest we forget it in our concentration on what the inscriptions say, we must remind ourselves of what they do not say. They did not profess what for 1220 might have been the usual pious platitudes of reverence for the Hindu gods. As we shall see, in fact they were positively and actively hostile to that old order.

110 Ibid., pp. 108-9.
111 G. Cœdès, 'Documents sur l'histoire politique et religieuse du Laos occidental', *BEFEO*, 25 (1925): 26.
112 Jayawickrama, *Sheaf of Garlands*, pp. 117-20, 126, 130-1, 140, 142, 146, 175-6.
113 Wyatt, *Nan Chronicle*, p. 101.
114 Ibid., p. 56. It is surely significant that the next event reported in the chronicle is the ruler's defeat of an invading Vietnamese force of 40,000 men. Though the Nan Chronicle was written at a late date (1894), its references to relics invariably are based upon much earlier sources (see pp. 10-11, notes 4-8).
115 In the translation of Griswold and Prasert, '[III/3-10] South of this city of Sukhothai … there is Phra Khaphung. The divine sprite of that mountain is more powerful than any other sprite in this kingdom' ('The Inscription of Rama Gamhaeng').

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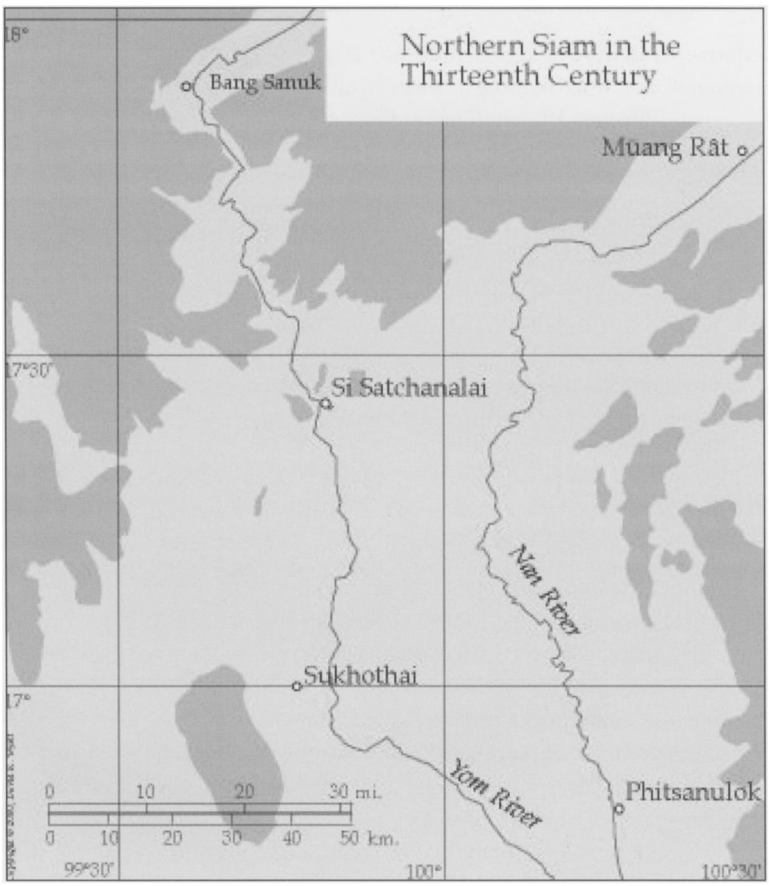


Map 3.

### Where did 'Sukhothai' come from?

If we accept the earlier (1219) date of the Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription, as I think we must, then what changes are required in our picture of life and history in the northern area of Siam in the thirteenth century? On the whole, it would seem reasonable to use the Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription to amplify and elaborate the story of Sukhothai, not to replace it. The question of the origins of Ram Khamhæng's script is only a variant on more general problems, namely, where does 'Sukhothai' come from; that is, who was involved in Sukhothai and from whence did they come, what did they bring with them, and on what was their distinctive style based? As an initial foray into this complex terrain, let us try to re-create the situation in the northern end of Siam at the beginning of the thirteenth century.

At that time, northern Siam, not surprisingly, was attracting several somewhat different groups of people from various directions. First, there were those who were moving down the Nan River valley, only one or two generations removed from the rugged and often poor fastnesses of northern and northeastern Laos, especially from the valley of the U River. These people were the increasingly distant relatives of people who were settling the so-called Plain of Jars region (Xieng Khouang or Siang Khwang) of north-central Laos,[116] and the ancestors of the rulers of late thirteenth-century Sukhothai. (The Ram Khamhæng Inscription likens Sukhothai water to that of

116 It is thus that we account for the fact that the Sukhothai dialect of Thai, historically, is closely related to Phuan, the Tai language spoken in the Siang Khwang region; see J. Marvin Brown, *From Ancient Thai*, Reference Sheet 10, p. 253.

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the Mekong, and refers to the people of the U and upper Nan River valleys.[117])

Second, there were groups of people moving into the region down the Yom River valley, from Phræ, Phayao, Chiang Khòng, Chiang Rai and Chiang Sæn, where independent principalities had flourished for nearly half a millennium. Both the Nan and the Yom groups we can think of as 'Tai', though we must remember that this is to be considered as a social, rather than an ethnic or linguistic, term. These groups were socially stratified into (probably) three layers. On top was a layer of *cao*, hereditary lords. These probably were the older of sets of brothers in what might be thought of as a system of ultimogeniture, a pattern of inheritance in which the older sons of a ruler were sent off (here, in a southerly direction) to seek their fortunes, accompanied by retainers and slaves, one after another, each with the help of his father and elder brothers, until only the last son was left to inherit the family's domain after all his older brothers had departed. In a situation in which the further south one went, the richer the lands, the elder brothers thus got better lands, while their younger brothers left behind were less well-off.

The third element in their populations – those called 'retainers' a moment ago – can be thought of as the dependents of the *cao* or lords. They were, on the whole, freemen who owed labour service to the lord in lieu of taxes, and rendered that service either on public works or in warfare. These are the people the inscriptions frequently label *phrai thai*, which in the context means something like 'freemen subject to labour service'. The so-called 'Code of Mangrai' said of them that they should be treated kindly, for they 'are rare, and should not be wasted' by allowing them to become slaves.[118]

The fourth and final element in these 'Tai' groups was a class of slaves, probably war captives obtained from outside the group, who were of upland (usually Austroasiatic) stock and laboured for the *cao* or sometimes for the *phrai*. It is difficult to imagine that they would have spent many generations in such servitude, and one supposes that they quickly became assimilated to the *phrai* class, to be replaced by other, new war captives. It is possible that such slaves were sometimes 'donated' by pious Buddhists (or others) to the hereditary service of religious institutions. Again, they do not seem to have remained in such status in perpetuity, and gradually (or rapidly?) merged with the general *phrai* population.

It is likely that there was also a substantial flow of people moving down the Ping River valley from the Lampang-Lamphun(-Chiang Mai) region. These would have been people socialised as Mōn, which is the language in the surviving inscriptions of the region in the upper Ping valley, although they might have descended from Tai or Lawa or Karen or other ethno-linguistic groups. They had two especially important distinguishing characteristics: they were Theravāda Buddhists, and they were literate. Indeed, in the tradition from which they came, the two were synonymous, for to be a (male) Buddhist was to be literate. All males were expected to spend a period of their youth (usually around puberty) in the Buddhist orders as a novice monk, and many remained in monastic orders after ordination at the age of twenty.

Although there must have been some intermixing or intermarriage of these somewhat different groups of people upstream along all three river systems, as individuals and groups moved around for trade or warfare or adventure, the real mixing occurred down on the plains in the various domains considered here, in what we have called 'northern Siam' or the northern Central Plain. Their mixture was further complicated by the fact that they were not moving into an empty area, but rather into an region already inhabited by Mōn and Khmer speakers, whose presence stemmed from earlier centuries of domination or influence by Dvāravatī and Angkorean civilisations.

117 The reference is particularly to the beginning of the fourth face of the Ram Khamhæng Inscription (Griswold and Prasert, 'The Inscription of Rama Gamhaeng', *EHS*, p. 278).

118 Wyatt, 'Laws and Social Order' (reprinted version), p. 76.

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If we try to think artificially of these separate sets of cultural influences being mixed together, or contending for predominance, in northern Siam in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, what do we find? On the top, we would have seen a ruling elite connected to the Angkorean empire, using the Khmer language in their official and religious documents, and oriented primarily towards an Indic religious tradition. This Angkorean group here was numerically small, soon to be overwhelmed by the in-migrants; and they were socially splintered by vast gulfs between masters and serfs (to borrow some loaded language) and by the existence of considerable numbers of slaves who were kept in place (in various senses of those words) by being attached to religious institutions. (In the Prah Khan Inscription mentioned above, for example, Jayavarman VII claimed to have bonded '208, 532 men and women [as] slaves of the gods' [stanza CXLII]. And this was just one of many such donations made by the king.)

If the Ping, Yom and Nan valley in-migrants were encountering such a society, how were they relating to it? Perhaps some were being grouped into villages, and then 'donated' as 'endowments' to 'the gods'. Others, presumably those better organised and armed, might have settled and arranged to pay their tax obligations in the form of labour service. Still others might have evaded incorporation into the existing regime, and tried to remain in less-settled areas. Over time, however, increasing numbers of these people, both long-time residents of the area and the relative newcomers, would have been swept up by the religious enthusiasms of the day. The Wat Bāng Sanuk Inscription provides us with a rare and valued glimpse of one such group of people at an early time.

The Wat Bāng Sanuk (or Müang Tròk Salòp/Chæ Ngun) people sound very much like the pioneers of what the late Kachorn Sukhabanij called a 'beachhead state'.[119] They reveal their Northern Tai or Tai Yuan origins in several ways: by their measures for days, months, and years, for example, and the particular way they celebrated festivals, with puffed (or parched) rice among other things. At the same time, they were adopting some elements of the area into which they were moving, such as noting that they were in a 'year of the hare', and enjoying musical traditions that may have differed from those they had left behind in the North.

There is more. These Wat Bang Sanuk folk clearly were bringing with them upland forms of social and political organisation, from the *müang* to the *khun* and the *mun nai*. At the same time, however, they were moving into an established area with its own name in a non-Tai language (Tròk Salòp). This was a liminal time, in a liminal area, and involving a liminal people. Here we intend 'liminality' to be understood in its more general sense, as being in-between – neither here nor there, or transitional between one state of being and another. The term may be inappropriate, to the degree that it implies the 'purity' of both the original state and the new state. In the case of Wat Bāng Sanuk, it would imply that by 1200 there was some specifically upland style or culture that was characteristic of, say, Chiang Sæn or Phayao, and a different style or culture characteristic of places like Sukhothai or Phitsanulok or Lopburi. In that sense, all those various places might have been 'liminal' by about 1200. That is, the region as a whole was in a process of flux under the impact of a particular configuration of influences. We can be fairly specific about the newer elements; but what of the pre-existing situation upon which those changes were operating?

Just for purposes of the present argument, let us try to describe the dimensions of the culture of northern Siam around 1200, comprising the region that includes the towns of Si Satcanalai, Sukhothai, Phitsanulok, and the surrounding area. The evidence on the basis of which we do so is extremely thin, for the region is almost devoid of pre-1200 inscriptions and has few reliable historical traditions. What we 'know' we learn from the few surviving pre-1200 monumental remains, and by

119 Kachorn Sukhabanij, 'The Thai Beach-Head States in the 11th–12th Centuries', *Sinlapakòn*, 1:3-4 (Sept.–Nov. 1957): 40-54, 74-81.

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reading back the written sources that come somewhat later. The addition of the 1219 Wat Bang Sanuk Inscription to this small fund is extremely useful, but more for the changes than for that which was changed.

The existence of Angkorean-style monumental remains throughout this area (and, indeed, far to the south) indicates that Angkor's influence was a stable fixture of the region. Naturally, those remains tell us something of the religious aspects of life in those times, featuring particularly a powerful Indic religious tradition that focused especially on the god Vishnu (but also Indra and Śiva, as well as a host of others), judging from the statuary that has survived.[120] In these terms we would expect that northern Siam had a religious life similar to that of Angkor and the Angkorean empire. At the same time, those religious traditions had apparently been domesticated, for their major archeological remains are distinctive. We should not forget that this religious life also could include some elements of a healthy Sanskrit Buddhism, judging from the way in which some of those elements were to endure in the northern and eastern parts of the central Indochina Peninsula.[121] The evidence is almost exclusively urban, involving particularly such buildings as Wat Phra Phai Luang in Sukhothai, Wat Mahathat at Si Satcanalai and perhaps Wat Si Sawai in Sukhothai.[122] We might surmise, then, that this 'Hindu' tradition was dependent upon urban, elite patronage, and probably benefited from the reflected power of the royal traditions that stood behind it.

This becomes relevant when we realise that the large monuments constructed in the main towns of the region had to have depended upon the pious benefactions of the elite – those involved with the Angkorean regime, either directly or indirectly – and upon the labour of the population at large, probably as much forced as voluntary. The fact that such construction was undertaken implies the necessary presence of building skills (particularly carving stone and stucco as well as wood) and experience in the construction of large, complex buildings. And the existence of such major monuments suggests the presence of some religious or cultural specialists whose lives revolved around written texts. This was a stable, settled society. It was not something that had been created overnight, but a complex social and political (and economic) system that had grown over some centuries – atop what base we cannot know.

To represent this pre-1200 situation, let us take Wat Phra Phai Luang, a large 'Hindu' temple that stood just outside the old city of Sukhothai.[123] This was a large building, roughly 25 metres in breadth and 40 metres long, set in a large, moated park-like precinct (see plate 3).

120 Cf. M.C. Subhadradis Diskul, *Hindu Gods at Sukhodaya* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1990).

121 John S. Strong, *The Legend and Cult of Upagupta: Sanskrit Buddhism in North India and Southeast Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), esp. p. 171.

122 Cœdès, *Indianized States*, p. 195, makes it appear that Khmer-style remains also are at Sawankhalok; but the source he cites – Jean Claeys, 'L'archéologie du Siam', *BEFEO*, 31, 3-4 (1931): 410-20 – makes it clear that Si Satcanalai (which is old Sawankhalok) is intended.

123 This site is curiously little studied. I have used the sections on it found in *Rāingān kānsamruat læ khuttæng būrana bōrānwatthusathān müang kao Sukhōthai Ph.S. 2508-2512* (Bangkok: Fine Arts Dept., 1969), plan facing p. 23, and pp. 9 and 23-27; see also Betty Gosling, *Sukhothai: Its History, Culture, and Art* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991).

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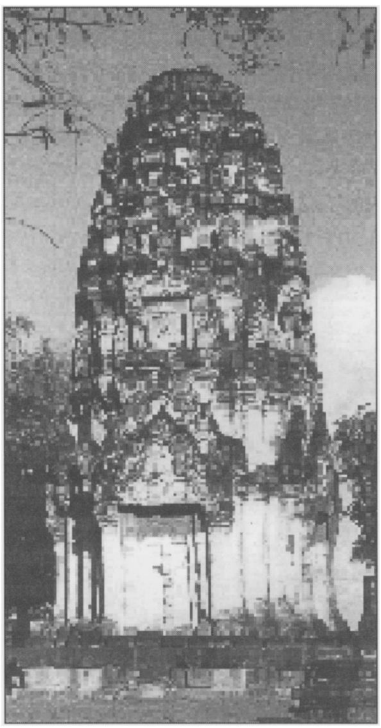

Plate 3 North tower (*prang*) of Wat Phra Phai Luang, Sukhothai

Its main focus was a triple-*prang*, three towers of which the centre one was taller than the two that flanked it. Of the three towers, only the north one has survived, but we assume that the other two were similar in style. Betty Gosling argues that the temple probably was built as a Theravāda, rather than Mahāyāna, institution,[124] though there is ample evidence from the surrounding region of the continuing presence and vitality of the various Hindu cults. The construction was primarily of laterite, faced with stucco. As with all the neighbouring monuments, the building of Wat Phra Phai Luang had heavy labour requirements; and that fact, in turn, has two interesting implications. First, the workers would have had to be organised, perhaps even dragooned, and it would have required some considerable social and/or political organisation to apportion tasks among numerous labourers and coordinate their activites. Second, the particular skills required included the procuring of suitable clay and firing it as bricks, the shaping of stucco and the manufacture of architectural ornaments. Thus, although we are dealing with a population that must have been predominantly rural and agricultural, the countryside was stocked with a considerable number of skills of a non-agricultural nature.

How might the sweat and skills of the rural population have been mobilised for the construction of Wat Phra Phai Luang (and similar buildings)? Farmers might have been impressed into armies with some regularity during the early part of the reign of Jayavarman VII of Angkor, and would have welcomed a year in which their labours were employed closer to home, with less risk of violent death or the other hazards of warfare. They might work with their families nearby, and eat home cooking.

124 Ibid., pp. 10-16. I was tempted here to use Wat Si Sawai (Sri Svai) as my example, which has a similar three-*prang* central tower like the Prang Sam Yòt in Lopburi, but there seems to be widespread agreement that Wat Si Sawai is later than Wat Phra Phai Luang. A good general reference work on the monuments of Sukhothai is the government report on the restorations done there in 1965-69, *Rāingān kānsamruat.*

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Moreover, we must not discount the possibility that they were motivated at least in part by piety. The Wat Bang Sanuk Inscription seems to imply that some of 'the populace' had heeded the words of 'Indra and B[rahma]'.[125] Their European contemporaries laboured on massive new cathedrals, and we might imagine that these Siam workers had similar (and similarly mixed) motives. Those at whose behest they worked might have hoped that these new religious shrines simultaneously expressed their membership in a universal religious community and their distinctive local identity, as well as marking the difference between 'city' and 'countryside'. But for all involved, at whatever level, their activities gained meaning out of their participation in the Angkorean system, which distinguished them both from other imperial structures and from the 'barbarians' up in the hills not far away.

These were heady times. The power of the king in Angkor seemed unchallengeable. Angkor had recently (1181) defeated its nearest rival, Champa, and had no serious challengers along its frontiers in any direction. Jayavarman VII undertook a massive programme of constructing public buildings, and extended Angkor's power as far afield as Sai Fòng on the Mekong River, opposite present-day Vientiane. As powerful as Angkor might have seemed, however, it was to prove as strong only as the best of its kings, and after the first quarter of the thirteenth century was but a shadow of its former self.

And yet, did the power of the king in Angkor really seem so unchallengeable? By 1219, many people of the northern Central Plain may have been grumbling. People might have resented the arrogance and pretensions of the donor and model of the *Jayabuddhamahānātha* images. They may have been chafing under the unceasing exactions of the Angkorean regime. A large portion of the Ram Khamhæng Inscription (if it can be attributed to the late thirteenth century, as I think it can) is filled with implicit, barely veiled criticisms of Angkorean rule.[126] They might have resented the obstacles that Angkorean officials, anxious about their labour supply, placed in the way of young men who wanted to spend time in the Buddhist monkhood. They probably felt over-governed and certainly felt over-burdened with taxes and bureaucratic restrictions. They surely were not the subservient, docile subjects the Angkorean monarch was told he had.

We do not know for certain when Jayavarman VII died.[127] Cœdès guessed that it was in 1219, based on the information in the 1357 Nakhòn Chum inscription. That inscription makes no direct reference to the death of Jayavarman, but it says that in the year 1219 the human life-span decreased from a 100 to 99 years, and that from that year, a 'year of the Hare', 'the princes, Brahmans and merchants gradually lost their high standing; the men who were learned in astrology and medicine lost their standing; from that time on, they were no longer favoured or respected'.[128] Cœdès read this bouleversement as a reference to the death of Jayavarman VII – something like the end of the 'good old days'. As he put it, in the eyes of the author of the Nakhòn Chum inscription:

> The year 1218 marked the beginning of the decline in the influence of the aristocracy based on Indian cultural traditions, made up as it was of the various elements mentioned: nobles, Brahmans, merchants, astrologers, and physicians. I feel inclined to interpret this passage as an expression of satisfaction on the part of the king [Lü Thai of Sukhothai] in being able to chronicle this 'transvaluation of all values' brought about by the break-up of the Indo-Khmer aristocratic society that was so alien to his own Buddhistic ideals.[129]

125 See above for the quotations, in lines 4-8 of the inscription.

126 See my article, 'Contextual Arguments for the Authenticity of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription', in Chamberlain ed., *The Ram Khamhæng Controversy*, pp. 439-50.

127 O. W. Wolters, 'Tāmbralinga', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 21, 3 (1958): 606-7.

128 Face I, lines 15-24. Translation (slightly modified here) from A. B. Griswold and Prasert Na Nagara, 'The Epigraphy of Mahādharmarājā I of Sukhodaya', *JSS*, 61, 1 (1973): 71-182; reprinted in *EHS*, pp. 448-65; original in *Cārük samai Sukhōthai*, pp. 26-39.

129 Georges Cœdès, *The Making of South East Asia*, tr. H.M. Wright (London, 1966), p. 133.

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It is interesting to see that Cœdès chose to emphasise the social and intellectual effects of 1218, rather than its political effects. However, whether Jayavarman VII died precisely in that year or some years earlier, the political changes of the period must have been profound. These were not only changes in the Angkorean capital, where building programmes ceased and Sanskrit inscriptions virtually died out: they also affected the whole swath of territory in the central portion of the Indochina Peninsula. To the east, the Angkorean army was withdrawn from Champa. In the west, the territory around the head of the Gulf of Siam known to the Chinese as Chên-li-fu had asserted its independence of Angkor, and Lopburi was not the only Central Plain principality to follow.[130] Soon, by mid-century, a whole rash of states followed their example.

If Jayavarman VII did not die in 1219, then to what is the Nakhòn Chum inscription referring? The question is by no means trivial. The Nakhòn Chum inscription is quite specific, and its reference to the Year of the Hare, equivalent to AD 1219, is quite unequivocal. Something of major significance has to have happened in that year. What might it have been?

### Allegiance and oaths

It is in this context that the Wat Bang Sanuk Inscription must be placed, being dated in 1219, and it is in that context that it must be interpreted. We might begin here by asking: What did 'independence' from Angkor mean? Much of Cœdès' discussion of this point centres on its political and military dimensions, though the passage quoted above also refers to social consequences. For Cœdès, the main operational word seems to have been 'allegiance', and it is worth thinking about how such relationships actually worked. We know that when kings went to war, they mobilised their friends and allies, whose fealty might cause them to send troops even a considerable distance, surely knowing that they could count on similar assistance in defending their own territories should the need arise. By definition, such relationships were between a single superior and numerous inferiors, their hierarchy sealed by the king-emperor's privileged access to supernatural powers, in which his vassals could share only vicariously. Their relationship was sealed, or confirmed, by some sort of an oath-taking ceremony, in which the vassals may have drunk sacrally charged waters, perhaps fortified with drops of their own blood. This potion might have been compounded of waters taken from sacred springs, streams, and lakes spread throughout their mutual territory, stirred perhaps by the magical sword of the king's regalia, and given its power by the ministrations of the king's religious functionaries, his Brahmans or chaplains.[131] The Angkorean governor of Sukhothai is thought to have sponsored the enlisting of some of the local chiefs in his neighbourhood, who were also given elaborate Sanskrit titles and probably some regalia of office.[132] We note that there is no evidence that the ruler of Tròk Salòp was similarly favoured, nor is there any indication of Angkorean influence even that short distance up the Yom River from Sukhothai and Satcanalai.

What, then, was the political status of Tròk Salòp? The ruler of Tròk Salòp makes no mention of any overlord – or, for that matter, of neighbouring or rival principalities. He seems to have been independent – not because he had broken free of some overlord (whose socio-political order otherwise would have been reflected in such words dealing with the social order in his inscription),

130 See Cœdès, *Indianized States*, p. 196. I also believe that the Phetburi region and the territory of the former Tambralinga at Nakhòn Si Thammarat had broken free of Angkor by this time.

131 On the question of oaths, see D. K. Wyatt, 'Three Sukhothai Oaths of Allegiance', a 1967 article reprinted in *Studies in Thai History*, pp. 60-9; and Cit Phumisak, *Ongkān chæng nām læ khòkhit mai nai prawattisāt Thai lum nām Caophrayā* (Bangkok: Duang Kamol, 1981). Such oaths are by no means just a phenomenon of ancient times, and there are reports of oath-taking in Thailand in 1996. See 'Teachers moved for [taking] "blood oath"', *The Nation* (Bangkok), 27 Feb 1996; I am indebted to Peter Vail for calling this reference to my attention.

132 The reference is to Śrī Indraditya and Bang Klang Hao - see below.

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but rather because he had resisted incorporation of his domains by rivals down the Yom River. Resistance is to be assumed because it is difficult to imagine that the rulers to the south could have ignored him; and that this resistance was successful might be surmised given the difficult terrain that insulated him from the south.

However, the key point about Tròk Salòp in 1219 is that the rulership in this domain (*müang*) seems recently to have changed, probably within the previous generation or two. This is suggested by the simple fact that its very name was a compromise: Müang Tròk Salòp is a combination of a Tai generic name (Müang) with an Austroasiatic specific, local name (Tròk Salòp). It sounds as though a long-established Austroasiatic place had been made 'larger', had been dignified, by being promoted into a new political hierarchy. To use Cœdès' (and Nietsche's) phrasing, the inscription announced (or confirmed) a 'transvaluation of all values', by which an established Austroasiatic place was re-designated a domain in a new political order, in which a new social order was established with the six social groups mentioned above, and in which an older cultural order (Indra and Brahma) was replaced by a new one, focusing on Buddhism.

Another interpretation of political change is suggested by the curious twofold nature of the ruler's title: 'the ruler of Müang Tròk Salòp [and] Chæ Ngun'. (A similar duality occurs with King Ram Khamhæng, who was the ruler of Sukhothai and Si Satcanalai.[133]) It is tempting to imagine that the dual title implies that the (unnamed) ruler first ruled Chæ Ngun and then, perhaps by conquest, added Tròk Salòp to his domain. (Alternatively, of course, he might have been ruling Chæ Ngun when it was invaded and then fled to take refuge in, or control over, Tròk Salòp. I am inclined to look to his simultaneous possession of the two, rather than his serial progression from one to the other, by analogy with Sukhothai-Si Satcanalai.) The likelihood of this occurring might be strengthened by the fact that 'Chæ Ngun' is a completely Tai name, befitting a ruler whose one inscription is written – mostly – in a Tai language.

Where did this ruler come from? If we assume that he is represented by his language, and by his culture of social order and of time reckoning, to cite but two elements, we naturally would look to the north, where toponyms beginning with 'Chæ' are relatively common. He is more likely to have come down the Yom River from Phræ and the northwest, rather than from the Nan River valley and further north, because the latter case would have brought him down the Nan River. Therefore, we might look for his origins in the Phayao and Chiang Rai-Chiang Sæn-Chiang Khòng regions - an area which by 1219 was coming under the domination of Cao Lao Meng (r. 1219-59), father of the future King Mangrai of Lan Na.[134]

Although Cao Lao Meng had not expanded into the Phayao region, which, after all, lay between the Phræ valley and the territory of Chiang Rai-Chiang Sæn where his (and Mangrai's) line held sway, it would seem that his cousin had done so. Legends perpetuated in the Phayao histories say that the twelfth and thirteenth-century kings of Phayao, culminating in the great Ngam Müang who was a contemporary of Mangrai and Ram Khamhæng, were distantly related to the Yonok kings of the Chiang Sæn-Chiang Rai area.[135] Some legends also connect them with the lines of kings of Phræ and Nan.

133 The references to Sukhothai–Si Satcanalai as a dual polity in the Ram Khamhæng Inscription begin only on the third face of the inscription and continue to the end (III/11, 17, IV/2). See also Jean Rispaud, 'Noms à éléments numéraux'. Note, however, that such toponyms usually contain two Thai names, not a mixture of Thai and non-Thai elements such as we have here.

134 See Wyatt and Aroonrut, *The Chiang Mai Chronicle*, pp. 14-16.

135 One full version of this tale is given in the nineteenth-century *Phongsāwadān Yōnok* of *Phraya* Prachakitkòracak (Chæm Bunnag) (7th edn, Bangkok: Khlang Witthaya, 1973), pp. 232-40. It seems to me confused, and I prefer the more straightforward version presented by Phra Ratchawisutthisophon *et al.*, *Müang Phayao* (Bangkok: Matichon, 1984), esp. pp. 108-9. This is based on the 'Phongsāwadān müang Ngœn Yāng Chiang Sæn', in *Prachum Phongsāwadān* [Collected Chronicles], pt. 61, vol. 33 (Bangkok: Khurusaphā, 1969), esp. pp. 238-9.

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The implication of the Phayao historical traditions is that Phayao was an important contemporary of the Haripuñjaya/Lamphun that Mangrai was to conquer in the 1280s. We might imagine that the movement of Tai-speaking peoples into the upper Yom valley originated from Phayao, rather than from Lamphun or Lampang, where the twelfth- and thirteenth-century populations, judging from the language of their inscriptions, were using Mōn rather than a Tai language. (This is, of course, a judgement as to their cultural expression rather than their ethnicity.)

We cannot be sure exactly where Tròk Salòp and Chæ Ngun were, but we can reasonably locate them somewhere in the upper Yom valley north of Si Satcanalai and south of Phræ. We might suppose that these localities were obtained by an unnamed ruler pursuing political and military tactics similar to those followed by earlier Yonok rulers, who were subsequently executed by King Mangrai after taking the throne of Yonok in 1259. To quote one old Chiang Mai chronicle:

> Some [domains] he conquered and some he did not, taking one domain in some years and none in others; sometimes taking two or three years for one; sometimes taking one without a battle. Those he took, he ruled, killing the rulers he conquered. When he killed the rulers, he would have one of his officers govern there, and sometimes he would maintain [the previous ruler] in charge.[136]

The quotation is apt, save that we know of only one domain possibly acquired by this ruler – Tròk Salòp. That is, we assume that he already ruled Chæ Ngun – the locality with the Tai name, which is the language of the inscription – and that he conquered or otherwise acquired control of Tròk Salòp. There may have been other acquisitions as well.

Neither do we know who this ruler was, for he is not named in the inscription. It is unlikely that he is of the lineage of the ruling line of Sukhothai, for he would then have been named among the 'grandfather' spirits of that lineage in later inscriptions,[137] and the lineage itself seems to be pointing in the direction of the upper Nan River valley and the U River valley north of Luang Prabang as its homeland. Instead, we probably should look in the direction of Phayao, which seems to have fallen under the control of Tai migrants in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The real significance of Tròk Salòp, however, has less to do with its political and military adventures than it has to do with religion. Remember that the main purpose of the Wat Bang Sanuk Inscription was to commemorate the enshrinement of Buddhist relics by the ruler of Müang Tròk Salòp-Chæ Ngun, and that only a powerful, meritful ruler could undertake such an act. Recollect also that the usual political pattern in this and neighbouring areas was to bind local figures to each other with oaths of allegiance, and that such oaths were enforced by supernatural forces, whether Hindu gods or local spirits (or, in the case of Angkor, 'the police'). The point here is to argue that, among other things, it was a new Buddhism that gave local people in northern Siam the power, or the courage, to break their oaths and to challenge Angkorean power. After all, exactly the same kind of self-confidence was required both to handle relics and to challenge Angkor. It was a confidence, however, which implied a very different relation between ruler and subject (or follower), and gave new significance to the concept of 'independence'.[138]

136 *Tamnān Mangrai Chiang Mai Chiang Tung*, ed. Thiu Wichaikhatthakha and Phaithun Dòkbuakæo (Chiang Mai: Social Research Institute, 1992), p. 1. The quotation would probably also apply to the rulers of Phayao, which makes it all the more appropriate to apply it to Tròk Salòp-Chæ Ngun. These two localities are not included among the traditional 36 districts of Phayao (*Phongsāwadān Yōnok*, p. 233).

137 On the 'grandfather' spirits, see Wyatt, 'Three Sukhothai Oaths', p. 63.

138 Tamara Loos examines this concept in '*Issaraphap*: Limits of Individual Liberty in Thai Jurisprudence', *Crossroads*, 12, 1 (1998): 35-75.

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### A new sort of Buddhism

Buddhism was not new to the region. In addition to the Wat Bang Sanuk Inscription, we have already noted two evidences of its presence in the region: the Dhānyapura Inscription of 1168, and the Wat Phra Phai Luang temple at Sukhothai, datable probably to the 1190s. (It is worth noting that Buddhism was not prominent in the early Yonok kingdom, located near the bend in the Mekong by Chiang Sæn.) Even more to the point, because of its date, is a Mōn-language inscription of King Sabbādhisiddhi of Haripuñjaya (Lamphun) who on Tuesday, 28 May 1219 (again, in the same fateful year) was briefly ordained a Buddhist monk, attended by his two sons.[139] He mentions in passing that his teacher had attained the age of 82 years, and that the king's entry into the Saṅgha was witnessed by 80 monks and 102 novices, 'all resident in this temple, Jetavana'.[140] By this time, Buddhism was clearly thriving in Lamphun, and was closely associated with royal power. Furthermore, Buddhism had been established for a sufficiently long time that a venerable monk could hold sway in the religious system for many decades (long enough to attain the age of 82).

In Lamphun and Wat Bang Sanuk, and probably in the case of Dhānyapura, Buddha relics were enshrined by a king whose active involvement with them was, *ipso facto*, proof of his moral worthiness; and in Haripuñjaya a king was ordained into the Buddhist monkhood. Their actions were accompanied by great communal approbation, and by great royal generosity – involving the building of a reliquary (implicitly with an associated religious institution staffed by educated practitioners) and its perpetual endowment.

But Buddhism – even Theravāda– had been around the region for a long time, and by 1219, we are told, even the Angkorean monarch was closely associated with the Buddhist faith. So what had changed? A number of features made the Buddhism of northern Siam of the early thirteenth century distinctive, in addition to the fact that it was expressed in the Pali language and fully embraced by royal power.

One way of thinking about the question of the relationship of Buddhism and royal power is to consider the then-recent example of King Jayavarman VII. He is said to have been a Buddhist, but of the Mahāyānist persuasion (and Sanskrit expression), devoted to the compassionate Lokeśvara Bodhisattva, who delays Nirvāna in order to help others achieve it too. Leaving aside questions of his sincerity, we remember that Jayavarman had sculptors fashion stone images of the Buddha, using his own physical form as their model. Those images he distributed to twenty-three cities, some of which can be located in what today is referred to as the Central Plain of Thailand.[141] One of those images appears to have been enshrined at Wat Phra Phai Luang in Sukhothai by 1191.[142] (We are left wondering which of the twenty-three toponyms represented in Jayavarman's list is to be identified with Sukhothai, for only perhaps six of them have been identified.)

Examination of the Angkorean inscription points up its differences with the other inscriptions we have considered, especially concerning their royal dimensions. The last part of the inscription culminates with the statement that each year, in a month equivalent to February, all these various

139 This is the later of the two dates mentioned in the inscription, which actually must date from slightly later; see R. Halliday, 'Les inscriptions Môn du Siam', *BEFEO*, 30 (1930): 90 (Vat Don inscription, face B, lines 12-13). The date of the inscription comes very close to working out: Tuesday, the 13th day of the waxing moon of the month of Jyestha is all right; but the Citra lunar mansion mentioned in the inscription was actually three days earlier. *Jinakālamālī* says little about him, beyond noting that he renovated the Reliquary built by Ādicca and had a long reign (Jayawickrama, *Sheaf of Garlands*, p. 110).

140 Vat Don Inscription, face B, lines 14-17 (Halliday, 'Les inscriptions Môn', p. 90).

141 G. Cœdès, 'La stèle du Práh Khan'. The translation of the inscription is on pp. 283-301.

142 Gosling, *Sukhothai*, pp. 9-10. The references on page 9 to the illustrations have been reversed: figure 6(a) is a better-preserved image that comes from Phimai, while 6(b) is the one from Sukhothai.

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Buddhist and non-Buddhist images (or portable replicas of them) are brought back in to the capital, and 'The brahmans, beginning with Śrī Sūryabhatta, [and] the King of Java, the King of the Yavana [Viet], [and] the two kings of the Chams each day piously bear the waters of ablutions.'[143] 'Lustration water' might be a better translation.

Now, whether the visiting dignitaries (or their representatives) were carrying the king's wash water for his daily ablutions as Cœdès states,[144] or instead were participating in the ritual lustration or annual ceremonial bathing of the images, the fact remains that they were placed in a decidedly subservient position, while Jayavarman VII seems to have been symbolically present in the facial features of the *Jayabuddhamahānātha* images which were the objects of public veneration. His predecessors had been similarly transmogrified in the images of such Hindu gods as Śiva and Vishnu, and Jayavarman's symbolic (and actual) position probably was not substantially different from theirs.

Was this, perhaps, the response of Jayavarman VII and the Angkorean elite to the religious changes that had been sweeping over the empire from the west and south? It is tempting to see their actions, as represented by the Prah Khan Inscription, as a sort of Counter-Reformation. It was misguided, and doomed to failure, for it was sorely deficient in understanding what the religious change had meant, and why it would amount to what can be called a 'religious revolution'.

This change was not something that happened overnight. We know that the ancient religious culture of Siam was Buddhist, and the characteristic monumental and artistic remains of the first millennium were Buddha images and the remains of Buddhist monuments. This culture was a distinctive feature of so-called Dvāravatī, including much of the Khorat Plateau, and of Lopburi and Haripuñjaya (Lamphun). Although this Buddhism was Theravādin, it included strong elements of Mahāyāna, and Sanskrit, Buddhism. However, a change began to overtake it from the west in the twelfth century, at much the same time as Angkorean power was exerted over it from the east. Those two developments were probably related to a third, the growth of strong shipping connections linking the Burma coast and the western side of the Malay Peninsula to the east coast of India and the island of Sri Lanka (Ceylon).[145] Whatever the political complications of the period – and they remain murky – one key new element was the increasing frequency with which Southeast Asians were coming into contact with people from South Asia (whether by travelling there or receiving visitors). One of the conclusions they seem to have drawn was that the Buddhism of Sri Lanka was in some important ways 'better' than the Buddhism they then professed. Vaguely, one senses that while in the eleventh century people from Martaban and Nakhòn Si Thammarat were travelling to Sri Lanka as individuals because they wanted there to live the life they otherwise glimpsed only at a distance,[146] by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries they were going there only for what they might bring back to Southeast Asia with them.[147] And while they had changed from

143 Prah Khan Inscription, stanza CLXVI (Cœdès, 'La stèle du Práh Khan').

144 Cœdès, *Indianized States*, p. 172, refers to 'his daily wash-water'. While Cœdès makes it appear that such acts were spread throughout the year, I read the passage to mean that this was only done as part of an annual ceremony in late February or so. For more on this question, see above.

145 See David K. Wyatt, 'Mainland Powers on the Malay Peninsula', reprinted in Wyatt, *Studies in Thai History*, pp. 22-48; and Kenneth R. Hall and John K. Whitmore, 'Southeast Asian Trade and the Isthmian Struggle, 1000-1200 A.D.', in *Explorations in Early Southeast Asian History: The Origins of Southeast Asian Statecraft*, ed. Kenneth R. Hall and John K. Whitmore (Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, 1976), pp. 303-40.

146 I am thinking here of such figures as the twelfth-century monk Dhammakitti of Tambralinga, who was a well-known author in the reign of King Parākramabāhu I of Ceylon, as well as other similar figures. G.P. Malalasekera, *The Pāli Literature of Ceylon* (London: Royal Asiatic Society Prize Publication Fund, 1928), pp. 195, 207.

147 Senerat Paranavitana, 'Religious Intercourse between Ceylon and Siam in the 13th–15th Centuries', *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 32, 85 (1932): 190-213; B. J. Perera, 'The Foreign Trade and Commerce of Ancient Ceylon: III - Ancient Ceylon's Trade with the Empires of the Eastern and the Western Worlds', *Ceylon Historical Journal*, 1, 4 (Apr. 1952): 301-20. For a broader view, see W. M. Sirisena, *Sri Lanka and South-East Asia: Political, Religious and Cultural Relations from A.D. c. 1000 to c. 1500* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

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passive to active participants in religious life, they also were making comparable changes in their social and political lives.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the main sites of this cultural transfer were at the head of the Gulf of Martaban along the Burma coast, and south on the Malay Peninsula, particularly in the central reaches that lay within the old kingdom of Tambralinga (where Nakhòn Si Thammarat is, but extending over both sides of the peninsula, including Trang on the west coast). What these centres stood for and practised was a new, much more rigorous sort of Theravāda Buddhism. It was founded especially upon very high educational standards, for it required that monks be able to approach the canonical texts of the religion in their original language, which they believed to be Pali. Having read Buddhist texts in the original, they were familiar with a new view of kingship and the state, as well as participatory modes of internal governance within the Buddhist monkhood, and they absorbed Buddhist ideas about the responsibility of the individual for his or her own moral fate.

Many would assume that the adoption of Buddhism of this sort involved a rejection of the Hindu gods and even of the animistic spirits, but such was not the case. The farmers of northern Siam, or of Dhānyapura and Haripuñjaya, had long lived in a world inhabited by Indra and the other Hindu gods, and many had been impressed into their service. They knew all about the spirits, at least of their immediate neighbourhoods. They were not inclined to reject them, for they knew better, but they were beginning to learn about other, higher forces as well. From early times, in the long course of Buddhism's development in India (and elsewhere), it had had to accommodate the matrix of gods and other super-terrestrial forces that already existed in the minds of potential believers. Part of the genius of this new tradition was that it did not abolish the Hindu gods or local spirits, but instead incorporated them into a newly rationalised and meaningful world order in which the Buddha descended from the thirty-third heaven flanked by Indra and Brahma. It was this revised world order that the Theravāda Buddhism of Sri Lanka offered to the Indochina Peninsula from the eleventh century onwards. Fed both by visiting monks from Ceylon and by Buddhist monks returning to Burma and the Malay Peninsula from study (and re-ordination) in Ceylon, the Tai groups had built thriving, energetic religious and intellectual communities on their 'beachheads' in the tenth and eleventh centuries, which by the twelfth century were extended into the Angkorean world of central Indochina from the south, and into the Haripuñjaya world from the west.

The progress of Buddhism was easier and more rapid in the north than it was in the south because there was less 'competition' from a strongly entrenched and state-patronised Hinduism of the sort that ruled in the Angkorean empire. Nor did Buddhism have the same political consequences or implications there that it had in the south, because for a variety of reasons there was less distance between rulers and ruled in the north. Rulers thus were not threatened as much by public, external standards of morality, although it is noteworthy that the Mōn kings of Sabbādhisiddhi's line in Haripuñjaya rarely seem to have dared to stray from the Middle Way. (They were finally overthrown by King Mangrai's agent, Ai Fa, when the latter duplicitously convinced people that King Yiba, the last of the line, was acting unjustly.[148])

The story of Mangrai and Yiba highlights one of the most important aspects of the religious changes of the period. The sub-text of the chronicle's story of these events is that the strength and solidarity of the community were based upon a shared moral vision. The 'good' community was one in which rulers and ruled alike agreed upon a common standard of morality, and worked together for the moral advancement of all. A ruler who did not share the community's vision, or whose

148 Wyatt and Aroonrut, *The Chiang Mai Chronicle*, pp. 27-33.

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behaviour offended community standards, was liable to be dethroned. This political theory was amply demonstrated in the canonical (and extra-canonical) texts of Buddhism.[149] More important, these texts (at least in theory) were freely available, in contexts where ordinary men were encouraged to read.

We can see this world clearly reflected in the 1219 Vat Don Inscription of King Sabbādhisiddhi in Haripuñjaya.[150] It mentions the building, five years earlier, of a special building (*uposatha*) for the conduct of rites of the monkhood (*saṅghakamma*). The most important such rites, of course, were ordinations, which required the participation of at least five senior monks (of five or more years' standing). The king's foundations were endowed with numerous pieces of land and slaves, and the inscription assumes the silent complicity of the community. We noted above the king's proud mention that his venerable teacher, 80 monks and 102 novices dwelt at the temple he had built. The tone of the entire inscription is of the king justifying himself by listing his considerable meritorious acts. Why is he doing so, if not implicitly to argue that he deserves to be king because of the considerable merit he has gained through his actions, which enables 'all creatures to be released from their suffering and attain bliss' (face A, lines 12-13)? This seems like a mature Buddhism, one that had become fully integrated into the moral life of the community.

There is a contrast with the Buddhism of the Dhānyapura Inscription of 1168. There, the main agent of the action – the donation of endowment to a relic of the Buddha – is a distant figure with a Sanskrit (not a Pali) name. He is represented by a 'chief-minister' who also has a Sanskrit title (which includes a phrase that could be translated as 'Śiva-land', Iśvaradvīpa), and neither he nor his master is credited with faith in the religious tradition they are here supporting. The implication of the stone is that the Buddhism at Dhānyapura might have a local following, but it was not the tradition of the ruler(s). We are not even told that it was locally popular, although it must have been if the ruler(s) considered it worthy of their attention.

The Buddhism of Tròk Salòp in 1219 lies somewhere between these two extremes, but closer to Haripuñjaya than to Dhānyapura. While the Dhānyapura Inscription's external references are to the ruler who has donated endowments to the relic, those of the Haripuñjaya and Tròk Salòp texts look forward in time to the rewards of merit and piety. Where the common people in Haripuñjaya witnessed the ordination of the ruler and his sons in the Religion, those of Tròk Salòp saw their ruler prostrate himself abjectly before the Triple Gems, and they joined him in building the reliquary.

It is the unequivocal image of the ruler subordinating himself that has the most to tell us about the real significance of the religious changes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It was not like the Prah Khan Inscription, where the king's vassals all assembled at his capital to ritually reaffirm their fealty to him; rather, a ruler and his people together reaffirmed their common faith, before and below which they all prostrated themselves. This was empowering to the ruler in a way quite different than having his spirit fused with the Hindu gods or his body merged with the physical representation of the Buddha: it created a strong, special relationship between the community and a specific moral code which superseded all other worldly ones.

149 Look, for example, at the *Mahājanaka Jātaka* (number 539 in *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, tr. E. B. Cowell and W. H. Rouse, vol. 6 [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1895], pp. 19-37). We might add that the last 10 *Jātaka* tales (nos. 538-47) were the most widely known, judging from how frequently they were depicted on temple walls, at least in later times.

150 Halliday, 'Inscriptions Mōn', pp. 89-90, has the translation from Mōn to French.

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### Buddhism and Angkor

The new Buddhism of Siam was by no means typical of the wider region during the same period. The dated inscriptions of these years (AD 1168-1219) are few in number and scattered widely, but their nature and their distribution indicate that momentous religious changes were underway.[151]

Leaving aside northern Siam, there are just two inscriptions from these years in the central, western, and southern regions. The first and best-known is the famous inscription on the Grahi Buddha, which all now seem agreed should be dated AD 1183. It is generally taken to emanate from a ruler of Śrīvijaya, ordering the man in charge of the province of Grahi (believed to be synonymous with modern Chaiya, just north of the Bay of Bandon) to create a Buddha image on which the Khmer-language inscription is written. It thus attests to the separation of at least the Grahi region from the Angkorean empire by this time.[152] (The fact that the inscription is in Khmer might say something about the cultural background of the region.)

The other inscription is from Lopburi and shares many of the same characteristics. This is a short inscription of seven lines in the Khmer language and script on the back of a headless stone Buddha image. Dated 1213, it simply registers the fashioning of the image by a certain Candasvāratana (whose name is itself more Pali than Sanskrit or Khmer).[153] The inscription includes no language that might indicate political or social relationships, but it does attest to a rather serious Theravāda Buddhism with references to a Buddha image in a posture under a Nāga hood and to the planting of a holy *pipal* tree. The time reckoning on the stone is in the usual Khmer fashion, with no hint of the Tai system employed in the Wat Bang Sanuk Inscription six years later.

A second group of Khmer-language inscriptions comes from the Pracinburi region now to the east of Bangkok. Two are from AD 1187 and two from 1193; thus all are from the reign of Jayavarman VII. Only one of the four seems to mention the king by name, as 'Jayavarmadeva'.[154] All are very short and provide scant evidence for anything but royal benevolence, and all have associations with brahmanical, rather than (Theravāda) Buddhist practice.

Seven of the remaining inscriptions are from the Khorat Plateau, in a region we assume to have been governed during this period from the Angkorean seat in Phimai. All of them are in Sanskrit, dated *śaka* 1108 (AD 1186), and all mark Jayavarman's gifts of so-called 'hospitals'. These can be taken as evidence, at least as of that year, of Angkorean power in the broad territory of Phimai, stretching up to the Vientiane region of Laos.[155] All are more or less identical, and are historically important mainly in the context of the Prah Khan inscription's record of royal donations of resthouses and hospitals. These inscriptions have no specifically Buddhist qualities.

Three more inscriptions are associated with Jayavarman's gifts of 'hospitals' and 'rest-houses', though their dates are somewhat later (AD 1192 and 1201). One, engraved on a bronze mirror-stand from Buriram, specifically mentions a donation of 'Śrī Jayavarmadeva' to a 'hospital'.[156] The other two, from bronze tripod vases found in Surin, do not mention the king by name, but mark the offering of 'the sacred Fire' to a shrine.[157] This is a clear reference to the use of fire in brahmanical

151 Note that I am dealing here only with dated inscriptions, not with the larger number that can be tentatively associated with this period.

152 G. Cœdès, *Recueil des inscriptions du Siam, deuxième partie: Inscriptions de Dvāravati, de Çrīvijaya et de Lāvo* (2nd edn, Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1962), pp. 29-31.

153 *Prachum silā cārük*, III, pp. 21-2.

154 *Prachum silā cārük*, IV (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1970), p. 151 (from the single-line inscription on the base of a bronze candlestick from Dong Si Mahapho, numbered 113 in the Thai corpus). The other Prachinburi inscriptions are in the same volume, numbered 109, 111 and 112.

155 These are listed in volume VIII of Cœdès' *Inscriptions du Cambodge*; they are numbered K. 368, 375, 386, 387, 395, 402 and 952. Five of the seven are in the general region of Nakhòn Ratchasima (Khorat) according to Cœdès, though some fall in the modern provinces of Chaiyaphum and Surin; the others are at Sai Fong and near Ubon.

156 Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. VII, p. 154.

157 Ibid., p. 155.

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rituals, and the references in the Prah Khan inscription to 'rest-houses with fire' (or 'hearths') should be seen in this light.

The conclusion to be drawn from a consideration of these sixteen inscriptions is an indication that Theravada Buddhism during Jayavarman's reign had penetrated only into the western fringes of the Angkorean empire, to Grahi and Lopburi, while the area to the east and southeast of Siam remained mired in the religious and (presumably social and political) system of Angkor. In the Grahi and Lopburi inscriptions there are no indications of Angkorean political or administrative power, though the absence of such references is not conclusive. However, given especially the religious contrast between these two inscriptions and the fourteen from the east and northeast, we can at least imagine that the western regions had sufficient latitude to undertake significant religious change. By contrast, Pracinburi and the Khorat Plateau seem to have remained firmly within the Angkorean sphere.

### The revolt of Sukhothai

By around AD 1220, then – just after the Wat Bang Sanuk Inscription – there is good (dated) epigraphic evidence to suggest that Angkor's power had waned in the basin of the Caophraya River. Theravāda Buddhism had established a firm foothold, from the middle reaches of the Malay Peninsula to the area we have been terming 'northern Siam'. It also had become well established to the northwest, in Haripuñjaya and the Mōn country. Although there are good reasons for scholars to localise the religious dynamism to the south later in the century, it is possible that during these early years there was as much dynamism coming from the northwest.

There is no explicit religious element in the solitary account that has survived of the dramatic political and administrative break between Angkor and its erstwhile feudatories to its west. There is nothing from Lopburi, and the account from Sukhothai – the inscription of Wat Si Chum – was written long after the fact in c. 1345,[158] perhaps a hundred years after the events it describes. The story it tells is only incidental to its main purpose, which was to eulogise a Buddhist divine. That Buddhist monk, however, was descended from illustrious kings, among whom was his grandfather, a certain Phraya Si Nao Nam Thom, who apparently ruled in the Sukhothai-Si Satcanalai region, perhaps as early as the 1220s.[159] His family domains seem to have been based especially in the area of the present-day province of Uttaradit, north of Sukhothai up the Nan River.

At some point in the first half of the thirteenth century, control of Sukhothai-Si Satcanalai (which already were 'paired') passed to a certain 'valiant Khmer Khloñ Lamphang', whose name the inscription gives with ambivalent respect and dread. We are thus encouraged to believe that Angkor established its administrative presence in Siam. Not far away, one of the sons of Si Nao Nam Thom, named Pha Müang, was ruling in a domain (*müang*) named Rat,[160] east of Uttaradit, with great wealth and power. Pha Müang was wealthy and powerful, and had long since made his peace with Angkor. As the inscription puts it: 'Formerly the god who was the ruler of Srī [Ya]śodharapura [Angkor] had given Phò Khun Pha Müang his daughter named Lady Sikharamahādevī, together with the sword Jayasrī and a title of honor.' He also had been given the courtly title of Srī Indrapatindrāditya, as well as the rank of *kamrateṅ añ*. Müang Rat has never been found, but if it

158 A. B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, *EHS*, pp. 342-404.

159 I am extrapolating here from information in the inscription that Si Nao Nam Thom was the father of Phraya Pha Müang, whom we will meet in a moment (Ibid., pp. 378-9).

160 The location of this place is much discussed. I follow the arguments of Griswold and Prasert ("King Lödaiya of Sukhodaya", *EHS*, p. 554 [originally published in *JSS*, 60, 1 (1972)]). There they locate it 50 km upstream from Uttaradit on the Nan River. It is in the extreme upper right-hand corner of Map 3 of the current work.

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were we might expect to find there a *Jayabuddhamahānātha* – one of the twenty-three Buddha-images that Jayavarman VII is said to have parcelled out among his feudatory princes. We must assume that Pha Müang swore a sacred oath of loyalty to the Angkorean sovereign, and that he regularly attended court festivities.

Then something happened - we are not sure what, for the inscription becomes illegible at that point. It seems to have centred upon a certain Bang Klang Hao, the lord of nearby Müang Bang Yang.[161] He might have offended the Angkorean authorities, or perhaps even refused to obey a command, and seems to have gone to Pha Müang for assistance. Thereupon he and the latter combined their forces and invaded the Angkorean dominions. They engaged 'the valiant Khmer' in battle and defeated him 'utterly', and the inscription tells us that Pha Müang was then able to enter the city of Sukhothai.

There followed an episode that long has puzzled scholars. Upon entering Sukhothai, Pha Müang promptly bestowed the prise of war upon his junior ally:

> Then Phò Khun Pha Müang was able to enter the city of Sukhothai. • He presented the city to Phò Khun Bang Klang Hao. • Phò Khun Bang Klang Hao, out of deference to his ally, did not enter it. Phò Khun Pha Müang withdrew his army, and Phò Khun Bang Klang Hao entered the city. • Phò Khun Pha Müang conferred the abhiseka [consecration] on Phò Khun Bang Klang Hao, as ruler of Müang Sukhothai, giving his ally his own name Sri Indrapatindrāditya, • which was the former title of Kamrateng Añ Pha Müang. • Formerly the god who was the ruler of Sri [Ya]sodharapura [Angkor] had given Phò Khun Pha Müang his daughter named Lady Sikharamahādevī, together with the sword Jayaúrī and a title of honor. The reason why Phò Khun Bang Klang Hao got the name Srī Indrapatindrāditya was because Phò Khun Pha Müang took his own name and gave it to his ally [together with] Müang Sukhothai, that is why. •[162]

The obvious puzzle is why the senior of the two rebels, Pha Müang – who held a very high Angkorean title as a *kamrateñ añ* and also possessed a royal Angkorean wife and a sacred sword – should have bestowed his title, together with rule over Sukhothai, on his junior ally, Bang Klang Hao.

Griswold and Prasert refer to the oath of allegiance presumably taken by Pha Müang to the ruler of Angkor (either Jayavarman VII [d. c. 1220] or, more likely, Indravarman II [d. 1243]), speculating that he might have felt released from that oath upon the ruler's demise.[163] Jayavarman probably died well before 1220; but even if his death occurred as late as that, it is still much too early for the fall of Khmer Sukhothai. We can say that with some confidence, as Śrī Indra(patindrā)ditya is the Si Indradit who was the father of the king reigning in the 1290s, Ram Khamhæng. Ram Khamhæng must have been born in the 1230s or 1240s, if he was still alive in the 1290s but died around the turn of the century. Therefore his father must have been born twenty to thirty years earlier. It strains credulity to imagine that Si Indradit could have been responsible for a major military action in Sukhothai as early as 1220. We can therefore rule out the time of the death of Jayavarman VII; it is more likely that the events alluded to here occured around 1243.

It is surely correct to focus on the supposed power of the oath that Pha Müang had taken to the Angkorean sovereign, and we must expect that Pha Müang (and Bang Klang Hao) were in fear and

161 Griswold and Prasert explain that the location of Bang Yang 'is not known. It may have been somewhere between Müang Rat and Si Satcanalai, or else perhaps at or near the modern Bang Yang, about 7 km south of New Sukhothai …; but these are no more than guesses'. Ibid., p. 380, fn. 33.

162 From the translation by Griswold and Prasert, *EHS*, pp. 380-1. I have revised their romanisation to make it consistent with the romanisation used throughout this essay. This is a translation of the Wat Si Chum Inscription, No. 2 of Sukhothai, Face I, lines 21-32.

163 Ibid., p. 357.

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awe of the unspecified deities and spirits that might wreak vengeance upon them as punishment for violating the oath. The oath must have been something like that which officials had sworn to King Sūryavarman I of Angkor in 1011:

> This is the oath which we … swear, all, without exception, cutting our hands,[164] offering our lives and our devotion gratefully, without fault, to His Majesty Sri Suryavarmadeva … in the presence of the sacred fire, of the holy jewel, the brahmans and the *acaryas* [teachers]. We will not revere another king, we shall never be hostile [to our king], and will not be accomplices of any enemy, we will not try to harm him in any way. All actions which are the fruit of our thankful devotion to His Majesty Sri Suryavarmadeva, we pledge ourselves to perform them. If there is war, we promise to fight and to risk life, with all our soul, in devotion towards our king. If there is no war and we die by suicide or sudden death, may we obtain the recompense of people devoted to their masters. If our existence remains at the service of His Majesty up to our death, we will perform our task with devotion to the king, whatever may be the time and circumstances of our death. If His Majesty orders us to go far away, to obtain information on any matter, we will try to learn the thing in detail and each of us to keep this promise in whatever concerns us. If all of us who are here in person do not keep this oath with regard to His Majesty, may He still reign long, we ask that He inflict on us royal punishment of all sorts. If we hide ourselves in order not to keep this oath strictly, may we be reborn in the thirty-second hell [the nethermost hell] for as long as the sun and the moon shall last. [165]

Perhaps more to the point are the oaths, which were a part of the culture of Pha Müang and Bang Klang Hao. Judging from the oath reputedly taken by King Mangrai of Yonok and King Ngam Müang of Phayao in that same century, these also were blood oaths, threatening dire punishments to those who did not fulfil their vows of loyalty to their overlords.[166] Punishments included physical torture at the hands of animistic spirits associated with particular holy places, as well as the spirits of departed rulers.[167] The combination of the fact that the Angkorean rulers regularly administered such oaths, and that oaths were taken seriously by the contemporaries and peers of Pha Müang and Bang Klang Hao, is sufficient reason to credit Griswold and Prasert's assertions about the importance of the oath and the gravity with which it was regarded.

However, the possibility that the co-conspirators felt that the oath pertained only to the now deceased monarch to whom it had been taken and therefore now had lapsed, does not explain why Pha Müang should have handed over the new conquest and his title to his ally. What seems more likely is that the oath was viewed as still in force and that Pha Müang tried to evade the results of breaking it by renouncing the consequences of his action and handing over their conquests to his partner who had not taken such an oath.

This explanation still evades the question of how Pha Müang and Bang Klang Hao summoned up the courage to challenge Angkor. There may be quite straightforward answers, such as some demonstrated weakness of Angkor, or its distraction by other conflicts. If that were the case, however, we might have expected similar rebellions in northern Siam at other times (such as Champa's sack of Angkor in 1177), but as far as we know this did not happen. The argument for such a

164 Presumably this was a blood oath, using blood from all the participants, mixed together.

165 L. P. Briggs, *The Ancient Khmer Empire* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1951), p. 151. There is a good text and French translation in Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, III, pp. 208-9. The long list of oath-takers which follows (pp. 210-16, unfortunately not translated) names many individuals with names or titles similar to that of Śrī Indra (patindra)ditya. Some examples (p. 210) include *mratāñ khloñ* Śrī Samarendra, *mratāñ khloñ* Śrī Uddhatavīravarma, and *mratāñ khloñ* Śrī Mahendravīra.

166 Wyatt and Aroonrut, *The Chiang Mai Chronicle*, p. 26.

167 Wyatt, 'Three Sukhothai Oaths', pp. 60-9.

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'permissive' or 'sufficient' cause for the Sukhothai rebellion must therefore be regarded as inconclusive.

One would not have to search very far to find reasons why Pha Müang and Bang Klang Hao might have rebelled against Angkor – that is, for necessary causes that, had they existed, would have required them to rebel. It has become usual to use the Ram Khamhæng Inscription to make this argument, for it includes a long section that repeatedly stresses things the king of Sukhothai does not do, implying that this differentiates him from other kings. There can be little doubt that that text is an indictment of Angkor's rule, because, for example, when the inscription mentions that the ruler does not levy a toll for travelling the roads, the word used for 'toll' is the Khmer term *cangkòp*. However, all the reasons that might be adduced for the revolt at Sukhothai might have been true over a long period of time, and they cannot – by themselves – be used to pick one particular time rather than another.

The case so far, then, lacks either sufficient or necessary causes for the Sukhothai revolt. As we try to understand the revolt of Pha Müang and Bang Klang Hao, it might be useful to recall how the episode compares to functionally similar passages in other histories in the period. The sharpest contrast is with the historiography of King Mangrai's ascendency in Chiang Mai region. Mangrai was an outsider to the area he was conquering, while Pha Müang and his friend were operating on home ground. The inscription's only reference to their opponent seems mostly respectful. They were not invading hostile territory or turning out the barbarians, but regaining control of their homeland. This aspect of the 'revolt' makes it somewhat more understandable, but it does not fully explain it. The question remains: Why should a challenge to Angkor have been mounted at this time, and in this place?

### Lopburi in myth and history

Lopburi was mentioned many pages ago, but has since been virtually forgotten – and, indeed, is usually omitted from studies of the thirteenth century in particular. There is some reason, however, to pause here and ask what its role might have been at this time and in the succeeding period, for Lopburi seems to offer the possibility of connecting the Si Satcanalai-Sukhothai region both to the Angkorean regime and to the newly arriving Buddhism that would distinguish that region from Angkor.

The epigraphic evidence concerning Lopburi is very thin and contradictory. Cœdès was convinced that it was brought within the Angkorean sphere only during the reign of Sūryavarman I at the beginning of the eleventh century, so we might expect it to have maintained a sense of distinctive identity.[168] Much often is made of the troops referred to as 'Syam Kuk' on the bas-reliefs at Angkor Wat, and mention is made nearby of the presence of Śrī Jayasiṅhavarman 'in the forest, leading the troops of Lavo'.[169] One important conclusion to be drawn from those captions is that Lavo and Syam Kuk were at that time (in the first half of the twelfth century) separate; the 'Syam Kuk' troops had their own leader.

We had occasion to note earlier that Lopburi probably was briefly independent of Angkor around the time of the Dong Mæ Nang Müang (Dhānyapura) inscription of 1168. The epigraphy of Jayavarman VII suggests that Lopburi had been brought back under Angkor's sway in the last decades of the twelfth century, as Jayavarman's son was now ruling there.[170] The 1213 inscription on

168 Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, III, p. 210.

169 See Etienne Aymonier, *Le Cambodge*, III (Paris: E. Leroux, 1904), pp. 262-3. In his 'Les bas-reliefs d'Angkor-Vat', *Bulletin de la Commission Archéologique de l'Indochine* (1911): 202-3, Cœdès slightly modifies Aymonier's translation, but does not materially change the meaning. On the Lopburi region, see *Cansen: Müang ræk rœm nai lum Lopburī-Pasak* (Bangkok: Ruan kaek kanphim, 1996).

170 Cœdès, *Indianized States*, p. 180.

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the back of a Buddha image at Lopburi, already noted, neither supports nor refutes the case for Lopburi's independence. This evidence is supplemented only sparingly and intermittently by the Chinese record, which includes Lopburi among Angkor's dependencies when Chao Ju-kua wrote in 1225.[171] Lopburi is not mentioned thereafter until 1289, when it is recorded as having sent tribute to the Mongols ruling China,[172] which it did separately from a kingdom referred to as 'Sien' for the next decade (and, indeed, as late as 1349).

The so-called *Annals of the North* is a modern compilation put together by a certain *Phra* Wichianpricha (Nòi) in 1807 in such a slapdash fashion as to render it highly suspect as evidence. At the same time, though, it does have the virtue of having been compiled well in advance of modern scholarship on the subject, and it is based on sources which have not survived elsewhere. Far from dealing with 'the North', it is concerned especially with what we have been calling 'Siam' in the pre-Ayudhya period. Notton translated the whole volume in the 1930s more or less as it stands,[173] but for our purposes what is more interesting and useful is the interpretive version put together at the turn of this century by the Thai official *Phraya* Prachakitkòracak (Chæm Bunnag), the *Phongsawadan Yonok*. This work was first written in the 1890s and revised somewhat in the following decade.

Explicitly basing his remarks upon the *Annals of the North*, *Phraya* Prachakit says that in Angkorean times Siam was divided into five regions: Lavo (or Lopburi), Suvarnabhūmī (Suphanburi, Kancanaburi, Phetburi, Ratburi, and Srivijaya); Śri Dhammanagara (Nakhòn Si Thammarat); Chaliangrattha (Sawankhalok [that is, Si Satcanalai], Sukhothai, and Kamphængphet); and Haripuñjaya (Lamphun).[174] Elsewhere he implies that Lavo enjoyed some primacy in the region, which fits with the other evidence we have.

More to the point, Lavo is often mentioned in early sources as a centre for the dissemination of learning, which included both the arts and sciences and religious instruction. The venerable *Mūlasāsanā*, which may reflect the oldest of northern historical traditions, refers to Lopburi (and Ayojjhapura, predecessor of later Ayudhya) as such a centre in the early fourteenth century with indications that this already was a long-established pattern.[175] The *Annals of the North* says that in 1254, both the future King Ngam Müang (b. 1238) of Phayao and Ram Khamhæng of Sukhothai were studying the arts in Lopburi with the same ascetic (*rishi*).[176] It is worth noting that neither of them was there for religious ordination, but rather for more general education. This suggests that, at least in the popular memory of a later day, Lopburi was remembered as a cultural centre.

However, Lavo or Lopburi in 1254 was still within the Angkorean empire, or at least in an Angkorean cultural sphere. If Ngam Müang and Ram Khamhæng were there, does this mean that the two princes were studying in 'enemy territory'? Ram Khamhæng was, after all, the son of Bang Klang Hao, who had joined with Pha Müang to wrest control of Sukhothai away from Angkor. If the legend of the student princes is to be believed, we must be cautious about reading modern political identities or modern passions into pre-modern situations. We must then think about the affirmative aspect of their 'education', that is, that they were affirming their cultural affinities with a Khmer-language but decidedly Theravāda Buddhist world.

171 Chao Ju-kua, p. 53. I do not regard this evidence as conclusive, as it was second-hand.
172 Paul Pelliot, 'Deux itinéraires de Chine en Inde à la fin du VIIIe siècle', *BEFEO*, 4 (1904): 241-3.
173 Camille Notton, *Légendes sur le Siam et le Cambodge (Annales du Siam, IV)* (Bangkok: Imprimerie de l'Assomption, 1939). The most accessible modern version is in the *Prachum Phongsāwadān*, of which it is the first section of the first part, originally published in 1904.
174 *Phraya* Prachakit, *Phongsāwadān Yōnok*, p. 67. He actually writes of a seven-part kingdom, of which Angkor and Champa are the other two parts. The division into seven is said to have taken place in 1099 or 1111 (p. 65); the latter date appears to have come from a French source. Later in the same paragraph he refers to the various 'treatises' (*tamrā*) he has consulted, without giving further details until he explicitly says that his lists of rulers are based upon the "Annals of the North" (*Phongsāwadān Nüa*).
175 *Tamnān Mūlasāsanā* (Bangkok: cremation volume for M.L. Det Snidvongs, 1975), pp. 191-4.
176 *Phraya* Prachakit, *Phongsāwadān Yōnok*, p. 249.

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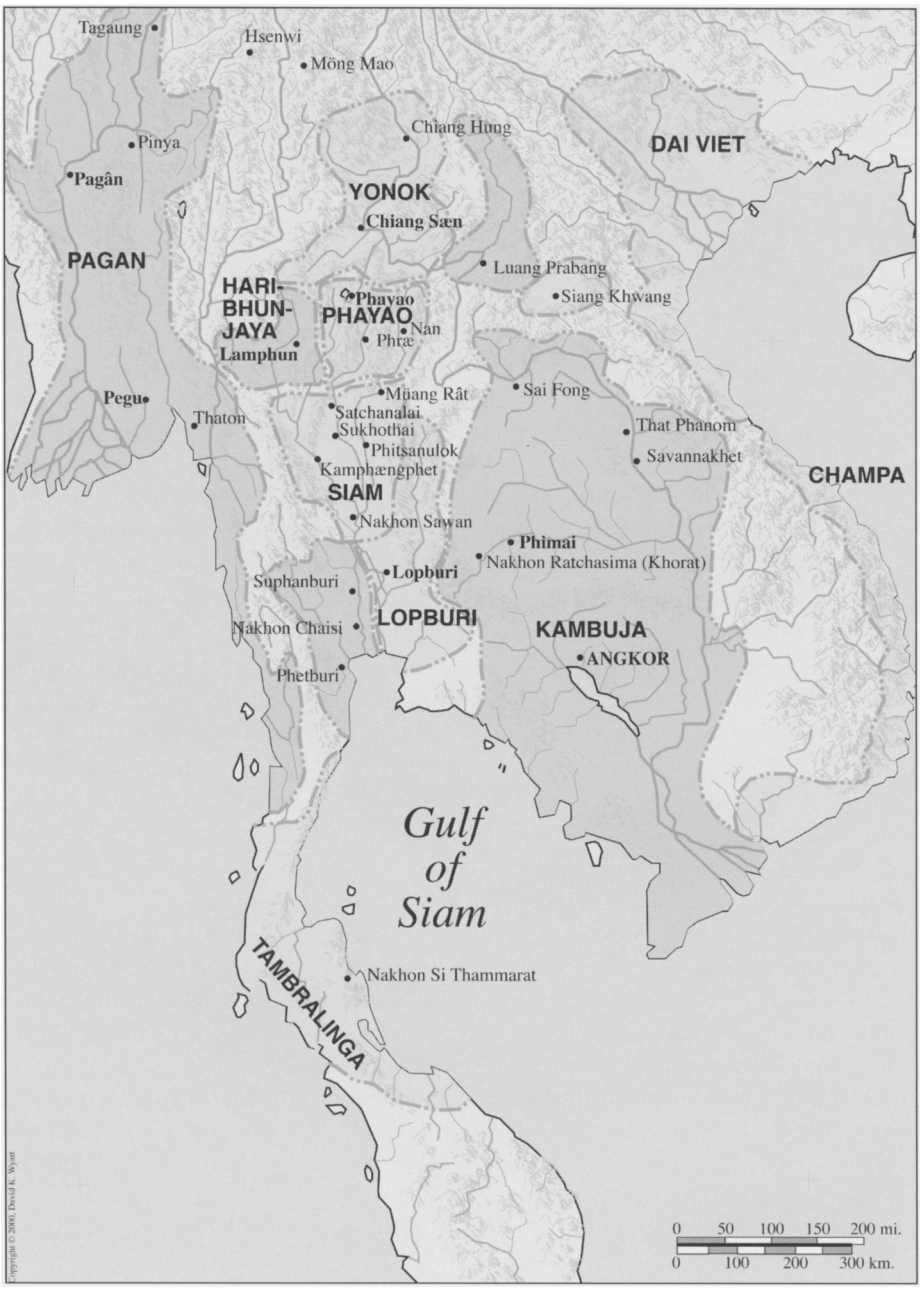


**Map 4.** Mainland Southeast Asia c. 1250

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### What happened to 'West Siam'?

To this point, our focus has been on what might be called 'North Siam', that is, the region from Phitsanulok to Uttaradit on the northern edge of what is now the Central Plain of Thailand. We have also been concerned, as far as possible, to follow what little is known about the history of the Lopburi region during this period. Both of these regions attained a degree of independence from Angkor during the course of the thirteenth century; both still moved within Angkorean civilisation, but were culturally more committed to Theravāda Buddhism. The most glaring omission in this picture is what we might call 'West Siam'; that is, the valley of the Tha Chin or Suphanburi River, from the sea up the western edge of the Central Plain to its juncture with the Caophraya in the region of modern Nakhòn Sawan.

The short answer to the question of what happened in 'West Siam' is to say that we know nothing. There are no inscriptions of this period from that region, and there is little trustworthy evidence from other sources. The long and more complete answer is, not surprisingly, also more complicated. We have to begin with the fact that all we have by way of evidence is fragmentary and highly legendary, or is suggested by what must have occurred in order for later situations to have taken shape in the way they did.

The first thing we know is that the region has a long and rich history, both in the period of Dvāravatī up to around the ninth century and during the period of Angkor from about the tenth to the thirteenth century. Especially in the vicinity of modern Nakhòn Chaisi (that is, at Nakhòn Pathom), Buddhism was prominent and strong at an early date, as is attested by the rich treasury of monumental remains there. (Note that the Phòngsi and Thiwa map shows Nakhòn Chaisi to have been higher in elevation than the apparently inundated region to its east.) Somewhat later, during the Angkor period, various toponyms in the region from Phetburi to Suphanburi are mentioned in Angkorean inscriptions, and at many such places there are Angkorean monumental remains – including even Müang Singburi, off the map to the west.

More relevant for our purposes – because concentrated in the period with which we have been concerned – are the Prah Khan inscription (1191), the Ch'en-li-fu episode (1200-05), and the whole question of the ceramics trade dealt with above. At least four of the Prah Khan toponyms are located in West Siam (Suphanburi, Samphukapatthana, Ratburi and Phetburi); none of the six identified toponyms is in what we have called North Siam, and two (Lopburi and Singburi) are in the 'East Siam' region of Lopburi. At the least, this would suggest that the region was well settled and prosperous, and 'civilised' even by Angkorean standards. This means not only that it was served by world religions, but also that it might have been viewed as a place that had to be propitiated by 'Buddhist' means through sending *Jayabuddhamahānātha* images.

What would account for West Siam's apparent urbanisation and prosperity? Why were there *four* important cities in this region? A reasonable guess would be that its prosperity was founded on foreign trade – especially the trade in ceramics – and we have already seen how important the Tha Chin River route was to that commerce (which of course also included trade upstream as well as downstream). It is also worth reminding ourselves that the foreign commerce ultimately depended upon a rural agricultural base and an urban infrastructure.

However, there is no escaping the fact that there is little if any 'hard' evidence concerning what was happening in West Siam during the century and a half from around 1205 until around 1350. We are compelled to believe that the region was not a quiescent backwater during this period, because it played such an important role in the middle of the fourteenth century. We are told by many sources that Ramathibòdi or U Thòng, the first king of Ayudhya (from 1351), came to

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Ayudhya from West Siam, apparently from Suphanburi. In addition, Charnvit Kasetsiri draws attention to an important historical tradition to the effect that Ramathibòdi's paternal ancestors were Chinese from Phetburi.[177]

There is more – but let us stop and consider what this might mean. To begin with, whatever the details, Phetburi (and the surrounding area) must have had commercial significance if it had a Chinese community of any importance. There are two possible sources of that commerce: ceramics coming downriver from the north, and rare aromatic woods like sappanwood, which came downstream from the northwest, towards Kancanaburi/Ratburi. If we accept tradition that King Ramathibòdi was 57 (current, not elapsed) years old when he died,[178] then he was born around 1313, and therefore his parents would have been married by about 1310 or 1311. We are not told who his mother was.

For the chronicles, the operative facts have to do not with Ramathibòdi's parentage but with his marriages. The likelihood is that by the 1330s or 1340s he had taken two wives, both of whom are very significant. There can be little doubt that one was a daughter of the ruler of Suphanburi. Why should such a highborn lady have deigned to marry the son of a Chinese 'merchant' from Phetburi? This question would seem to suggest both Suphanburi's weakness and Ramathibòdi's strength. Suphanburi must have needed the Phetburi Chinese connection rather badly for its people to have consented to such an alliance – all the more so as they were willing for the husband of their ruler's daughter to rule in Suphanburi in preference to her brothers (one of whom, Bòrommaracha, was eventually to succeed to the throne of Ayudhya in 1369). If, as we think, Suphanburi was concerned especially to keep its ceramics trade flowing down the Tha Chin River, it would have been led to cultivate good relations with the towns on the coast, *and* it would have cemented good relations with Sukhothai, which claimed suzerainty over it in the Ram Khamhæng Inscription of 1292.

Also reinforcing the supposition that Suphanburi had a pivotal role between the source of Sukhothai ceramics and coastal marketplaces is the question of Theravāda. We know that numerous sources make strong connections between the Buddhism of northern Siam and that of Nakhòn Si Thammarat and Sri Lanka. These references go back to the 1290s and continue through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, often specifically mentioning these localities. Taken together, they suggest the existence of a well-travelled trade route from Sukhothai through Suphanburi to Phetburi and Nakhòn Si Thammarat, thence overland to Trang on the west coast and again by sea to Sri Lanka. The role of Suphanburi was central so long as the trade (and especially the ceramics) moved down the Tha Chin River. The fourteenth-century shift in importance from Suphanburi to Ayudhya might suggest a reorientation of trade from the Tha Chin to the Caophraya. It may also suggest a re-drawing of the trade routes owing to changes in water levels on the various rivers of the region.

It would be a mistake to imagine that Suphanburi's history begins only with its mention in the Prah Khan (1191) and Ram Khamhæng (1292) inscriptions. Dhanit Yupho follows a long and lively tradition that, based especially on the *Annals of the North* and the so-called 'British Museum' edition of the Ayudhyan royal chronicles, stretches the history of Suphanburi back over two centuries or more.[179] He actually speaks of a succession of principalities: first Traitrüng, opposite Kamphængphet on the Ping River, from c. 1004 to 1163; and then Thepnakhòn (or Devanagara),

177 Charnvit Kasetsiri, *The Rise of Ayudhya* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 63-72.

178 Jeremias van Vliet, *The Short History of the Kings of Siam*, tr. Leonard Andaya, ed. David K. Wyatt (Bangkok: Siam Society, 1975), p. 60.

179 Dhanit Yupho, *Rüang müang Traitrüng Û Thòng læ Ayōtthayā* (Bangkok, cremation volume for Mrs Rattana Manittayakun, 1960); see especially p. 64. Richard Cushman's synoptic translation of all the chronicles of Ayutthaya is scheduled for early publication by the Siam Society.

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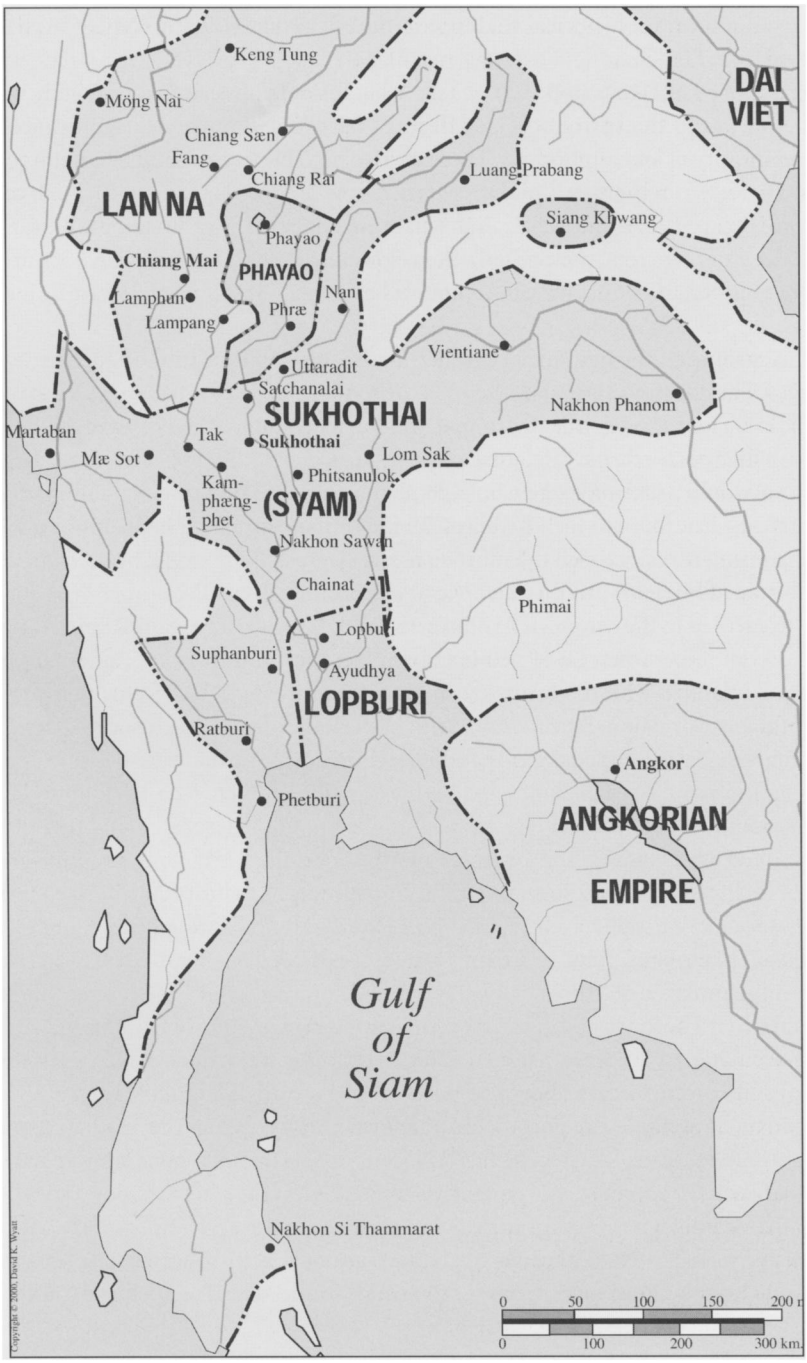


**Map 5.** Siam c. 1300

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which he equates with Suphanburi, from 1163 until 1350/51. His evidence is mainly legendary, and the closest he can come to a hard date on the basis of epigraphic evidence is to suggest that U Thòng as a toponym is definitely attested in the last half of the 1220s. Needless to say, this date is highly suggestive. Dhanit hypothesises that Ramathibòdi succeeded to the rulership of U Thòng in 1341, after having married the first child (daughter) of the previous ruler.

That brings us to Ramathibòdi's second marriage.[180] The theory is that Ramathibòdi was also married to a princess of Lopburi. This is based mainly on the fact that, when his son Ramesuan was deposed by his uncle Bòrommaracha in 1369 after only a few days on the throne, he was not killed but was allowed to go to rule Lopburi, and then from that base he was able to recapture the capital after Bòrommaracha's son Thòng Lan briefly ruled in 1388. In Ayudhya, when claimants to the throne were unsuccessful in their bids for power, they regularly were killed. Since Ramesuan was not killed, but was allowed to go and rule in Lopburi for the next 19 years, we have to assume that he had some special claim to power there; and the most reasonable grounds for supposing that he had such a claim would be that he inherited it from his mother, as his father is not recorded as having any particular rights there. Perhaps Ramathibodi's mother had been a Lopburi woman? (In general, the Lopburi people took the 'Rama' element as part of their names, while the Suphanburi people adopted 'Bòrom–'. Some, in noting this fact, have wondered why 'Ramathibòdi' himself was so named. The important point here, of course, is that he managed personally to combine 'West Siam' and 'East Siam' in founding the new kingdom of Ayudhya in 1351.)

Lest we lose sight of the importance of 'West Siam', the point of the preceding is to assert that not only Lopburi but also Suphanburi (and Phetburi) were well-established, long-lasting enterprises whose roots extend backwards in time at least to the 1220s, and probably considerably before that. They were thus part of the political and cultural 'landscape' in which not only Ramathibòdi and Ramkhamhæng but also Bang Klang Hao and Pha Müang flourished.

### Relics, oaths and politics

Rebellion is not a trivial action. On some occasions it might be rash and ill-considered, undertaken hastily and quickly regretted; or it might be an act of desperation or anger. Usually, however, it is done deliberately, and if it is to succeed, it is prepared and carefully plotted. Most of all, rebellion requires self-confidence and an utter conviction that the cause in which one is risking all is morally certain. Such confidence, or the lack thereof, is a cultural feature as much as it is a psychological one. Those who in the thirteenth century (or earlier or later) usurped Angkorean power and replaced it with their own had to have been people of maturity and moral confidence.

We have little information about the personalities or beliefs of Pha Müang and Bang Klang Hao. Pha Müang is at the centre of the actions narrated in the Wat Si Chum inscription: we know that he had some experience of the Angkorean regime; that he had a wife with court origins; that he probably had sworn an oath of allegiance to Jayavarman VII. He was rich and powerful by the standards of his own day, in his own locality. For reasons unspecified he joined Bang Klang Hao in fighting the 'valiant Khòm' at Sukhothai: he and his ally probably were kinsmen, perhaps through their wives or mothers? At the conclusion of their campaign, Pha Müang gave up his title, his share of the conquests, and probably his regalia, the sword Jayaśri – but probably not his 'royal' wife.[181]

180 The most important statement of the 'two marriages' idea is in Charnvit, *The Rise*, pp. 69 ff.

181 The named sword (Jayaúrī) is also mentioned in Inscription C.5 (the second Mango Grove Inscription, ca. 1361), face I, line 11 (conjectural restoration by Griswold and Prasert, 'The Epigraphy of Mahādharmarājā', p. 508). This sword must have been similar to the Sri Kañjeyya sword of King Mangrai of Chiang Mai and his successors, which tradition dates back to the seventh century AD. See Wyatt and Aroonout, *The Chiang Mai Chronicle*, pp. 47, 170 and 193.

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In his later years, Pha Müang seems to have devoted himself to Buddhist piety, when he was still the simple ruler of Müang Rat. As the Wat Si Chum inscription tells us, he 'caused *cetiya* to be built, he earned the gratitude of many kings, he was the teacher and protector of a whole throng of monarchs. … he bestowed alms … on venerable persons in enormous quantity'.[182] His piety even outlived him, for his nephew was to be the leading Buddhist monk of his day, in the early years of the fourteenth century.

To begin with, then, we note the strong strain of Buddhist piety in the Pha Müang/Müang Rat side of Sukhothai's 'ancestry'. It is probably worth noting Pha Müang's nephew's combination of piety and worldliness. In addition to pious alms-giving and charity and his pursuit of solitude and nature as a Buddhist monk, this Sri Sraddhā was said 'to wander about the country in search of wisdom … [He knows all] countries, he knows all languages'.[183]

By contrast, much less is known of Bang Klang Hao, though from a few inscriptions we can say quite a bit. He now ruled Sukhothai-Si Satcanalai, with the title Śrī Indrāditya ('Glorious Sun of Indra'). For all his impetuous martial accomplishments, he must have been a serious young man who worked hard at being a successful ruler. According to the Ram Khamhæng Inscription, he took to wife a woman of some distinguished ancestry herself, for she was styled 'Lady Süang'; together they had five children, three of whom lived to maturity. In his early years as ruler, he defeated attacks by rivals who surrounded him, aided by his sons, who also undertook raiding expeditions in his neighbourhood. Ultimately his two elder sons succeeded him as ruler, the second as King Ram Khamhæng (probably by the 1260s, or perhaps a bit earlier). Bang Klang Hao/Śrī Indrāditya seems to have been pious like Pha Müang; and if the puffery and exaggeration of the inscriptions are to be believed, the ruling classes of Sukhothai or Siam were very serious about Buddhism.[184] From what we are told of them and of the generation they raised, they were quite interested in Buddhism, including especially the bodily relics of the Lord Buddha. Several of them enshrined such relics.

Sometimes when the early monarchs of Siam are brought to mind, we tend to think of their martial exploits, or their legal pronouncements, or even their scholarly and artistic interests; but modern scholarship seems curiously uncomfortable with their religious qualities. This is especially unfortunate because the religion of these times seems to have functioned to bind societies together and to motivate both individuals and groups in ways that were not common or perhaps even possible, before that time. Thirteenth-century Buddhism may have acted as powerfully on followers as it did upon their leaders; and it is sometimes difficult to tell when rulers acted out of social compulsion to do what their societies expected of them, and when they took the initiative and set an example which others could follow. It might be difficult to locate precisely where the motivation came from in any particular case, but the real point is that the difficulty of making this judgement derives from the religious convergence of people across a broad range of social statuses.

A strongly shared sense of communal religiosity could by the early thirteenth century be a major source of strength to frontier societies such as these. They were closely knit societies, because they lived densely packed in small areas carved out of the wilderness that seemed to surround them, never very far from the reach of various predators, whether four- or two-legged. They probably did not suffer gladly the attempts of outsiders to interpose their authority upon them. They must have resisted Angkorean attempts to define 'Buddhism' for them with the *Jayabuddhamahānātha* images

182 I/38-41; Griswold and Prasert, *EHS*, p. 382.

183 Ibid., p. 383. Their footnote reminds us that Cœdès read this sentence differently: 'The men of the Khmer country came seeking learning [in Sukhothai].' I prefer their reading.

184 I would not take seriously the seemingly 'Hindu' cast of his title with its reference to Indra, for Indra was also an integral part of the Buddhist world-view.

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and annual lustration pilgrimages to Angkor. This was not a conflict that pitted 'Thai' against 'Khmer', for the lines between them were not drawn in an ethnic or religious fashion. Instead, it was a religious and cultural line that defined the growing separation between them. Ultimately, it came down to a question of the locus of agency; that is, what were the relative responsibilities of rulers and ruled for the moral integrity and salvation of the community?

The presence of, and human interactions with, Buddhist relics in northern Siam during this period highlight the nature of the religious change, and they also help to elucidate the political upheavals. The focal point of the Wat Bang Sanuk Inscription was the enshrinement of corporal relics of the Buddha, as well as Buddha images (which are also considered as a kind of relic, *dhātu*) and various lavish gifts. One of the key sub-texts of the inscription was the implied demonstration that the ruler was worthy of kingship, as he demonstrated by personally and physically handling the relics. Numerous texts speak of kings handling relics; and in most cases they indicate that (as if with a will of their own) relics innately resist handling by unworthy creatures. Take, for example, the lengthy passage about relics in the Wat Si Chum Inscription, which describes some of the miracles and marvellous acts of which relics were capable.[185] At times, it seems as if every major monarch of the region in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries enshrined relics; but what the texts that mention these acts really mean is that various rulers had the self-confidence, and the popular support, that emboldened them to handle relics. Similarly, it was rulers who routinely performed the ceremony of 'opening' the eyes of (or painting eyes on) images of the Buddha.[186]

Whence did rulers obtain such self-confidence, such courage, as to be able to handle relics – and what does it matter? They did not obtain such power from the top down, through a gift from the gods, or by having a special relationship with Śiva or Vishnu (like the kings of Angkor described in the Sdok Kak Thom Inscription[187]). By a form of reasoning that is admittedly circular, they were born kings because of the merit gained in previous existences: birth as a king, or a successful seizure of the throne, constituted proof that one deserved to be a ruler. And as king, one had to perform meritorious acts on a grand scale in order to offset the demerit that necessarily followed upon performing such regular royal acts as ordering executions and being responsible for deaths in warfare. As rulers, then, these kings had perpetually to toe that narrow line between submission to their superiors (if they had any) and rebellion against them, and relics helped to nudge them in the direction of resistance.

We are rarely told what others thought of their rulers, but it is possible to imagine circumstances that worked to enhance social solidarity, both improving the quality of communal life and increasing the authority of the ruler. This ripe medieval Buddhism simultaneously boosted the individual's responsibility for his or her own salvation (through merit-making and religious self-awakening) and validated and strengthened the bonds that held the society together – socially through a maze of rituals and the exchange of personnel between the laity and the Buddhist monkhood, and politically by stressing open consensus-building (even democratic governance) by exposing most young men to the internal governance of the monkhood. Theravāda accepted

185 Griswold and Prasert, *EHS*, pp. 389-404. The reader will also find useful Hans Penth, *Jinakālamāli index: an annotated index to the Thailand part of Ratanapanna's Chronicle Jinakālamāli* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1994), p. 159 and related entries.

186 Cf. Richard Gombrich, 'The Consecration of a Buddhist Image', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 26, 1 (Nov. 1966): 23-36. Gombrich is writing about Sri Lanka in the 1960s, but what he says is equally applicable to medieval Indochina. It is particularly useful to be reminded that the most powerful Buddha images were blessed with having a bodily relic of the Buddha encased within, and that the most important images were so consecrated by kings. Note especially his discussion of the long tradition of such consecrations, going back to the time of the Emperor *Aśoka* in the third century BC (pp. 26-7).

187 See, for example, Hermann Kulke, *The Devarāja Cult* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1968).

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human inequalities and rationalised hierarchy, while carefully defining the proper uses of authority and the restraint of anarchy. Under these circumstances it is possible to imagine a social order imbued with Buddhism that would validate and legitimate rulers, especially in the eyes of those who would follow them, as well as in the eyes of the rulers themselves.

We can imagine that the most difficult thing about being a king might have been that initial daring act of seizing power, which invariably was performed by men who already enjoyed some local prestige as 'lords' and some local hereditary high status. The Buddhist fervour represented in varying ways in the Dhānyapura, Haripuñjaya, and Wat Bang Sanuk Inscriptions was what gave them the sure sense of moral authority, the personal self-confidence, and the public support that made it possible for them to dare to contravene the oaths they had sworn and mount ultimately successful challenges to the rulers whose religious views had identified them more with their gods than with their people.

We have reached a point in studying the early history of Siam when it becomes increasingly necessary to look more carefully at the evidence for the period prior to the 1290s. Whether we do this because the 1292 inscription of Ram Khamhæng is discredited, or because we date the Wat Bang Sanuk Inscription to 1219, ultimately is irrelevant. The important thing is to look at all the evidence – whether 'Thai', 'Khmer', 'Chinese', or otherwise – and to use it to build a new picture of a local world of experience that, because of conditions peculiar to a particular locality, was unique. Northern Siam's experience during the period of Jayavarman VII was quite different from that of Isan, Haripuñjaya, or Yonok. It was not necessarily a 'Tai' experience: not only did the Khmer language continue to be used in the region for several more centuries but also the accumulated experience of Angkor long continued to be of relevance and utility to many, probably rulers and ruled alike.[188] It was to be that flexibility, that syncretism, that would prove to be the hallmark of a 'Siam' in the process of formation.

188 It is both interesting and pertinent to note that of the 49 'Sukhothai-period' inscriptions in the collection *Cārük samai Sukhōthai* (1983), only two-thirds (30, actually) are in Thai language and script, 10 are in Khmer script and 9 are in mixed scripts. This fact might be kept in mind together with the persistence of casting images of Vishnu and Śiva in bronze.

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## Appendix – The Inscriptions

The table below gives details as to the names, numbers, and published texts and translations of the most important inscriptions that are used in this study.

*BEFEO* – *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* (Hanoi, Paris, 1901 – ).
C. – Inscription number, following the scheme begun in G. Cœdès, *Recueil des inscriptions du Siam* (vols. 1–2; Bangkok, 1924–32) and continued in *Prachum silā cārük* (vols. 3–6; Bangkok, 1965–78).
*CSS* – *Cārük samai Sukhōthai* (Bangkok, 1983).
*EHS* – A. B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, *Epigraphic and Historical Studies* (Bangkok, 1992).
*JA* – *Journal Asiatique* (Paris).
*JSS* – *Journal of the Siam Society* (Bangkok, 1904– ).
K. – Inscription number in the series for Cambodian inscriptions used in G. Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge.*

| Name | Year (A.D.) | Number | *CSS* pages | *EHS* pages | Journals |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dong Mæ Nang Müang | 1168 | K.966, C.35 | — | — | *JA* 246/2, 1958, 125–142 |
| Prah Khan | 1191 | K.908 | — | — | *BEFEO* 41, 1941, 255–301 |
| Wat Bang Sanuk | 1219 | C.107 | 21–25 | 768–773 | *JSS* 67/1, 1979, 63–67 |
| Sabbādhisiddhi | 1219 | LPh.01 | — | — | *BEFEO* 30, 1930, 87–90 |
| Ram Khamhæng | 1292 | C.1 | 4–20 | 241–290 | *JSS* 59/2, 1971, 179–228 |
| Wat Sī Chum | c.1345 | C.2 | 58–79 | 342-404 | *JSS* 60/1, 1972, 21–153 |
| Nakhòn Chum | 1357 | C.3 | 26–39 | 433–465 | *JSS* 61/1, 1973, 71–182 |

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